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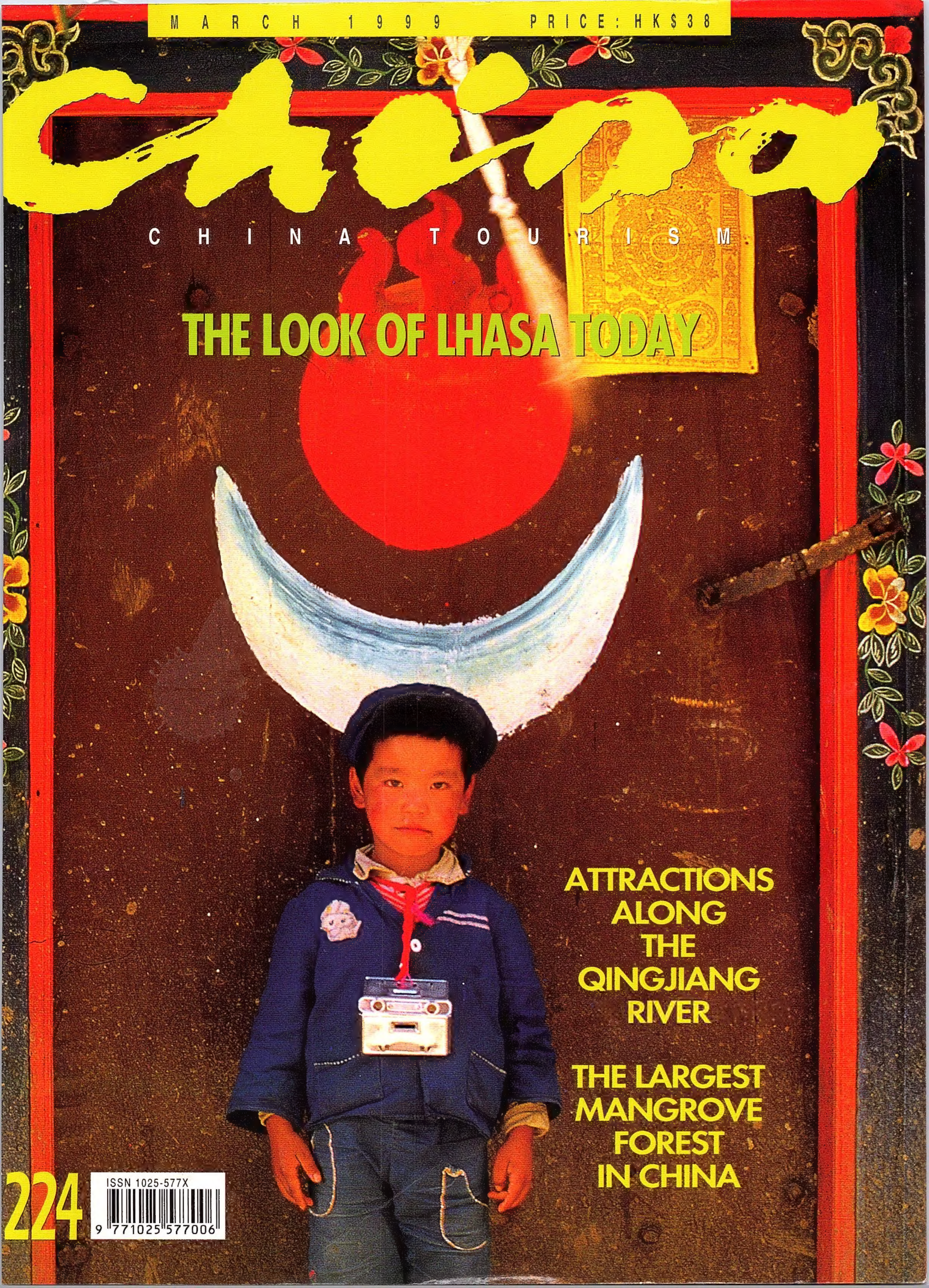

THE LOOK OF LHASA TODAY

ATTRACTIONS ALONG THE QINGJIANG RIVER

THE LARGEST MANGROVE FOREST IN CHINA

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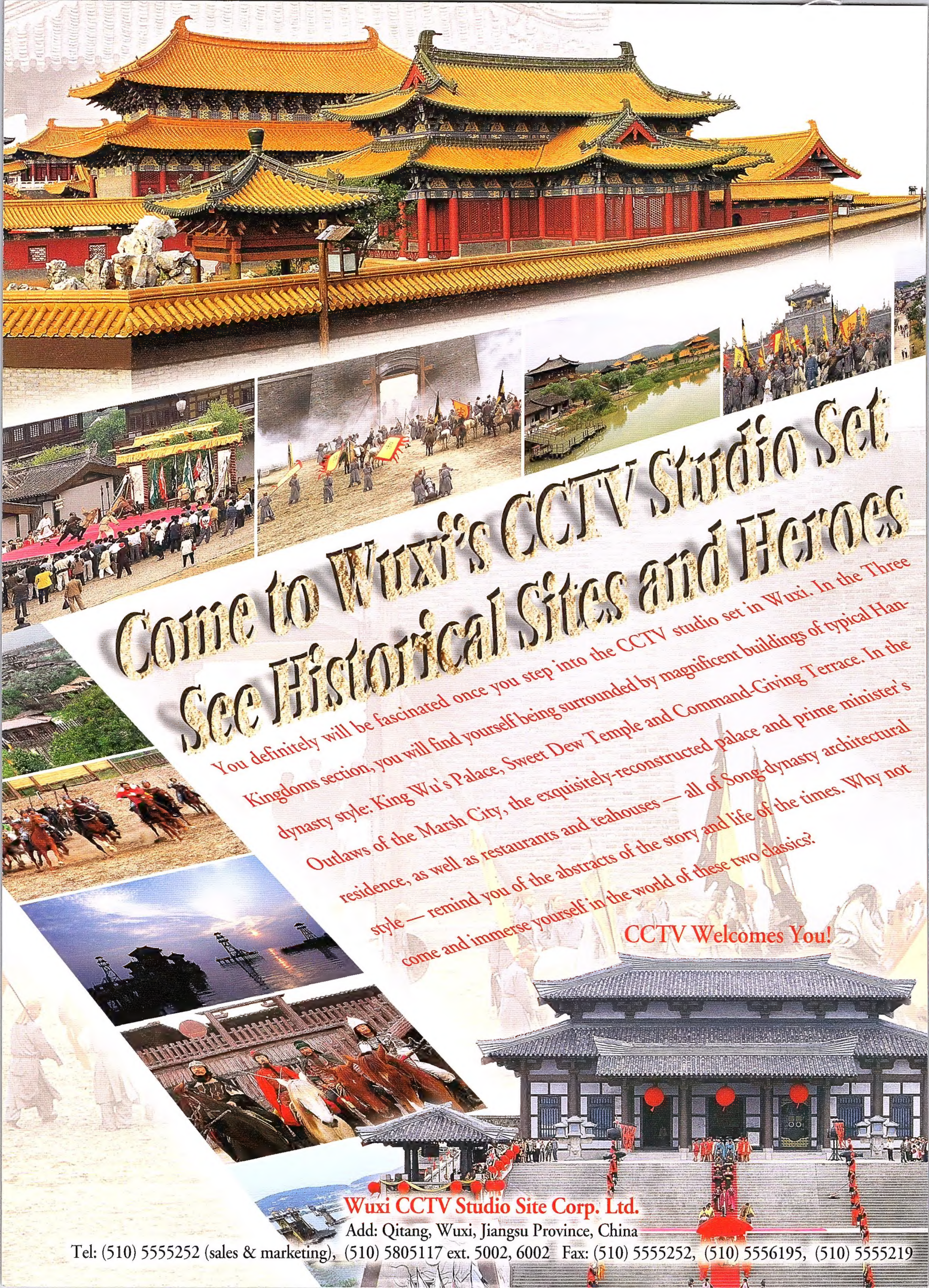

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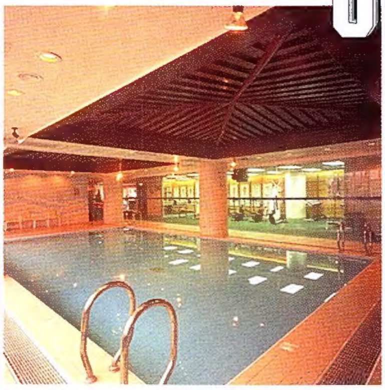

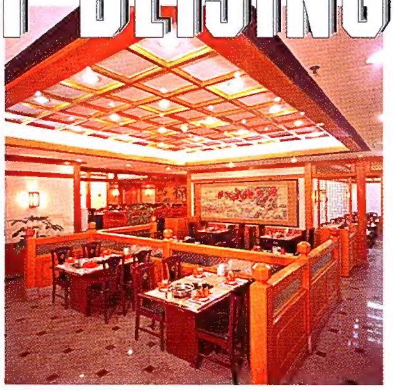

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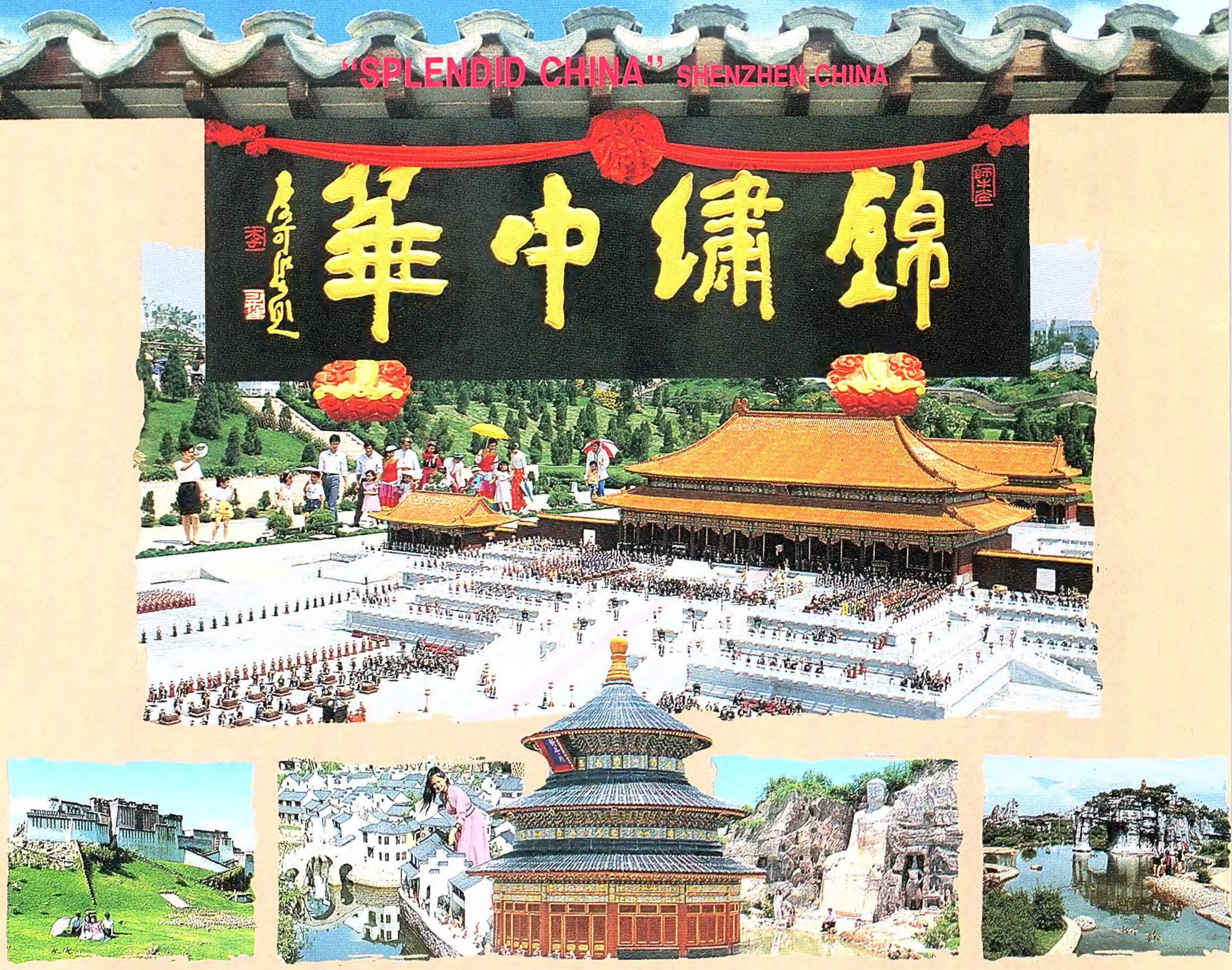

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China
CHINA TOURISM

CONTENTS

No. 224 March 1999

Cover: A young pupil in Lhasa (by Wang Miao)

FEATURES

10 Lhasa Today

Photos & article by Xie Guanghui

Tibet, lying in Southwest China, is a sacred sanctuary for Buddhists, a paradise for explorers, a challenging target for mountaineers, and a dreamland for tourists. While the atmosphere of romance and mystery still remains, the city of Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, has also caught up with the pace of modern society. Tourism is booming and there are even Internet cafés and nightclubs.

50 Looking for Ice and Snow in Yunnan

The Bewitching Snow-covered Jiaozi Mountain

Photos & article by Yi Jiabao

Climbing the Snow-capped Cangshan Mountain in Summer

Photos & article by Kong Yunfeng

Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, is known as the Spring City because of its year-round warm weather. Surprisingly, a few hours' drive from the city will bring you to two separate snow-covered mountains, where you can indulge yourself in a lovely silvery world, even in summer.

56 Travelling Along the Qingjiang River

Photos & article by Shan Xiaogang

The Qingjiang River runs almost parallel with the Yangtse River along a stretch from Wanxian in Sichuan Province to Yichang in Hubei. Its course is marked by beautiful limestone caves and unique customs of the Tujia people, one of the Chinese ethnic groups; you can also experience the thrill of rafting on the turbulent waters.

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China
CHINA TOURISM

CONTENTS

No. 224 March 1999

64 In the Depth of the 'Red Forest'

Photos & article by Huang Yanhong

Four hundred years ago, an earthquake caused a large area in Qiongzhou County in Hainan to sink perpendicularly into the sea. Many villages disappeared underwater overnight, and in their place have appeared 3,300 hectares of mangroves. This biggest "red forest" in China is now open to tourists, providing facilities such as pleasure boats, restaurants and villas.

70 Mt. Guanzhi, Bandit Village and Shimen Lake

Photos & article by Li Zi

This is a new tourist spot in Fujian Province. On the mountain top there is a stronghold of the bandits in the old days. Amidst rugged peaks and thick forests lies Shimen Lake, a lovely stretch of clear water.

DEPARTMENTS

7 From the Editor

8 Update

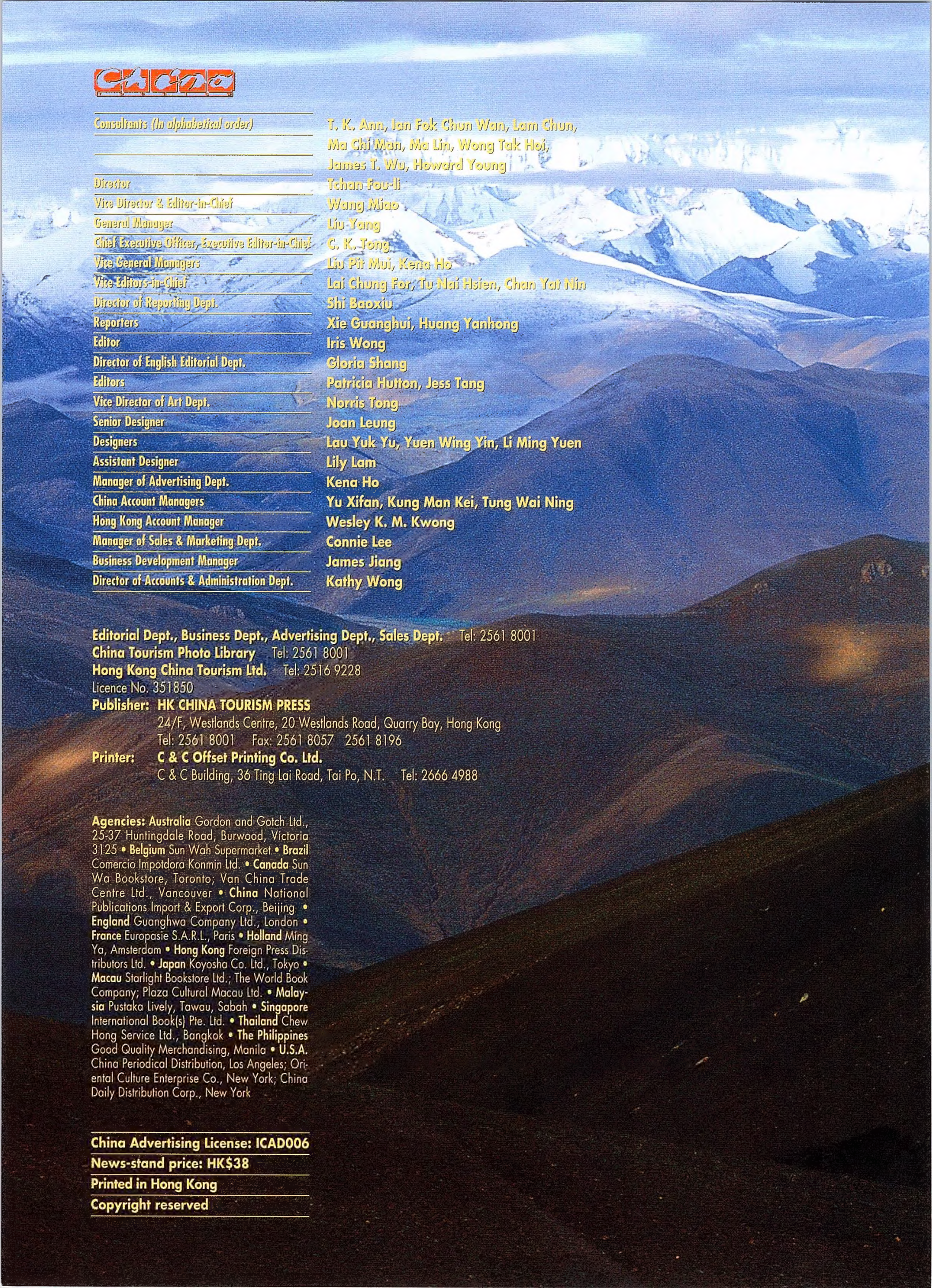
76 Local Guide
Walking Through the Tiger Leaping Gorge
Photos by Xie Guanghui Article by Yu Ming

78 Traveller's Corner
A Happy Family in the Snow Country
Photos by Yi Yangdong Article by Xiaoyu, Yangdong

81 Next Issue

82 China Tourism Index (Issues 186-221)

86 Back Issues of China Tourism (1997-98)



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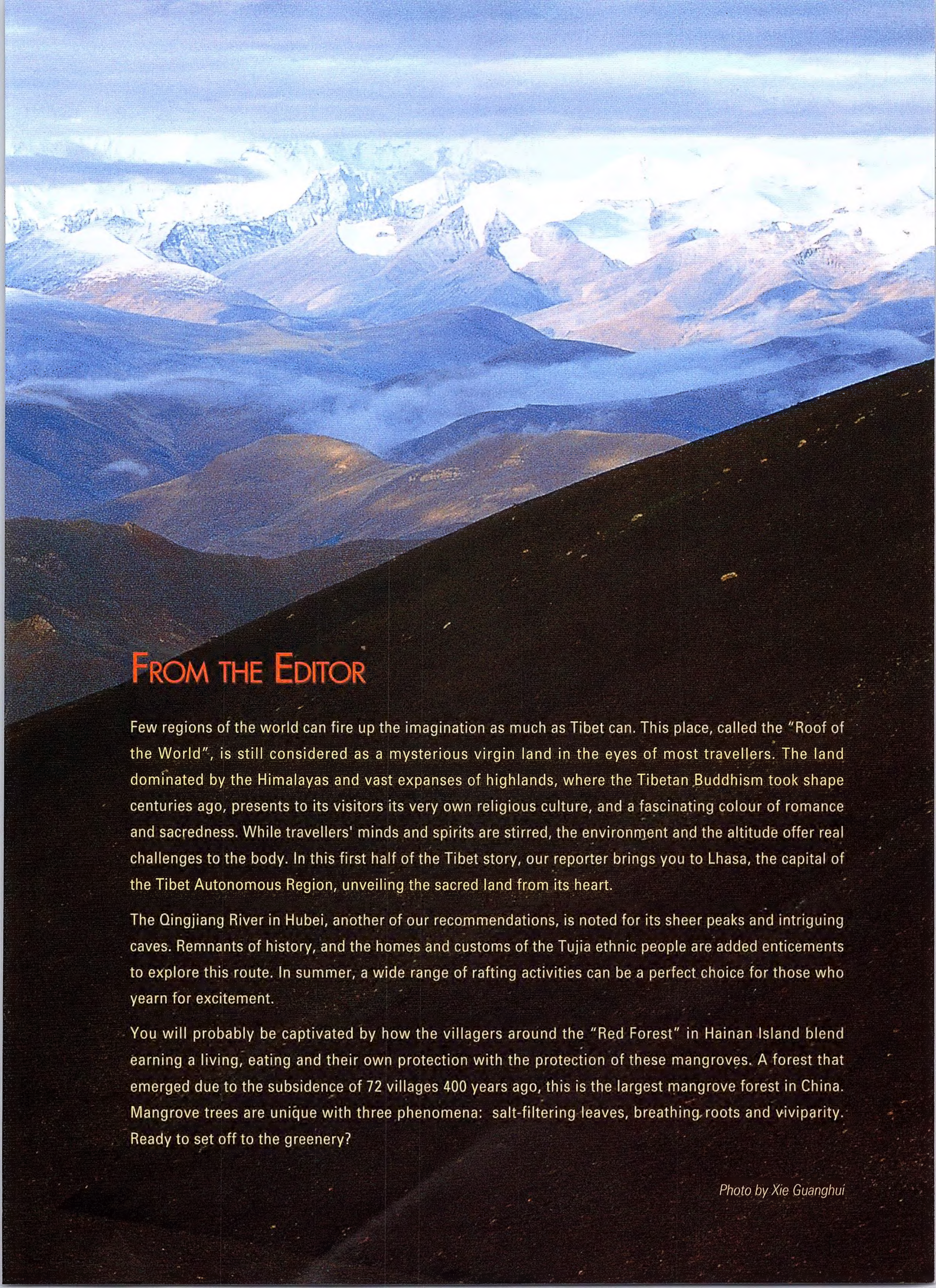

FROM THE EDITOR

Few regions of the world can fire up the imagination as much as Tibet can. This place, called the "Roof of the World", is still considered as a mysterious virgin land in the eyes of most travellers. The land dominated by the Himalayas and vast expanses of highlands, where the Tibetan Buddhism took shape centuries ago, presents to its visitors its very own religious culture, and a fascinating colour of romance and sacredness. While travellers' minds and spirits are stirred, the environment and the altitude offer real challenges to the body. In this first half of the Tibet story, our reporter brings you to Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, unveiling the sacred land from its heart.

The Qingjiang River in Hubei, another of our recommendations, is noted for its sheer peaks and intriguing caves. Remnants of history, and the homes and customs of the Tujia ethnic people are added enticements to explore this route. In summer, a wide range of rafting activities can be a perfect choice for those who yearn for excitement.

You will probably be captivated by how the villagers around the "Red Forest" in Hainan Island blend earning a living, eating and their own protection with the protection of these mangroves. A forest that emerged due to the subsidence of 72 villages 400 years ago, this is the largest mangrove forest in China. Mangrove trees are unique with three phenomena: salt-filtering leaves, breathing roots and viviparity. Ready to set off to the greenery?

Photo by Xie Guanghui

Family Inns Spring Up, Tibet

Tourists travelling in the Tibet Autonomous Region can easily find a place to pass the night these days, as hundreds of inns run by local farmers and herdsmen have sprung up across the region. These small hotels are especially welcomed by foreign visitors to Tibet because of their unique life style and good service. More Tibetans are taking advantage of the flourishing tourism industry. Currently, there are more than 300 family inns in Tibet.

Flying Across the Three Gorges in Car

After his successful air-borne crossing of the Yellow River driving a car, the stunt man from Taiwan, Ke Shouliang, is going to meet a new challenge this coming April — he will drive his car to cross the Three Gorges of the Yangtse River!

The chosen venue is Xiling Gorge, one of the Three Gorges, where the distance between the shores is 60 metres. Ke is determined to break the world record of 55 metres for such a feat. A domestically made car will be used, and several auto makers have expressed their willingness to participate, but the final choice has yet to be made. Hundreds of volunteers have made applications to do preparatory work; among them are students, officials and soldiers. The event will be jointly sponsored by the All-China Sports Federation, Hubei Provincial Sports Federation, and the municipal government of Yichang.

New Exhibition Hall To Be Built, Palace Museum

The Palace Museum in Beijing recently announced a three-year plan to build an underground exhibition centre to house its collection. The new hall will consist of two floors, totalling 20,000 square metres in space. This new structure will make it possible to put more of the museum's invaluable collection on display. The lower floor will feature exhibits of gold ornaments, jewellery, diamonds and jade, while the upper level will be for displaying paintings, calligraphy works and bronzes.

The hall will be built in the same architectural style of the palace complex, and will be equipped with fire prevention and air conditioning facilities to protect the exhibited treasures. The Palace Museum, or the Forbidden City, was built in 1420 and is the largest and best preserved ancient building group in China.

Yongtai Temple Renovated and Re-opened, Henan

After a five-year renovation, Yongtai Temple, a Buddhist nunnery in Mount Songshan in central Henan Province, has been opened to tourists. Located near the famous Shaolin Monastery, the nunnery was built in 521. It is one of the oldest nunneries in the country. A princess of the Ming Dynasty once lived in this temple as a nun.

Amex Members Can Get Renminbi in China

The Bank of China and American Express have signed an agreement that starting in 1999, American Express members travelling in China can obtain Renminbi at any ATM linked to the bank's network. At present, Amex members can get yuan at the Bank of China's 526 ATMs, with 2,100 other ATMs eventually opening for Amex members later.

The Bank of China has also signed similar agreements with Visa and Mastercard, and other international credit card organisations. This will offer great convenience to business people and tourists to China.

Mysterious Grottoes, Zhejiang

A group of 24 ancient caves were discovered recently in Zhejiang Province. These caves are scattered in the hills near a village called Xiaonanhai and have long been unfailing sources of water for the local villagers to irrigate their farmland. In May, some curious farmers used a dozen pumps to draw water from one of the sources for two weeks. When it was dried up, they found the grotto to be more than 3,000 square metres in area. The cave is 30 metres high and its ceiling is supported by three stone pillars in the shape of fish tail. On one of its walls there is a carved creature, half bird, half horse. Chisel marks can still be seen on the walls.

Archaeologists have not yet reached a final conclusion on the purpose nor the time period of these caves. Most agree that the construction started in the Qin or the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.). Some hold that they were used as grain depots during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220).

Terracotta Warriors Dressed Up

Visitors going to Xi'an to see the life-size terracotta warriors will soon be able to see some of the clay figures dressed in colourful clothes, instead of their current appearance in a dull earthen grey hue. The museum plans to display several terracotta warriors in dark red or green selected from the best preserved Pit No. 2.

At present, more than 1,000 figures and horses have been unearthed and put on display. According to archaeologists, many of these figures were colourfully painted at the time they were discovered. However, their colour quickly peeled away after they were exposed to the air. Now the museum is making painstaking efforts to solve this problem, and the first group of coloured figures may be available this spring.

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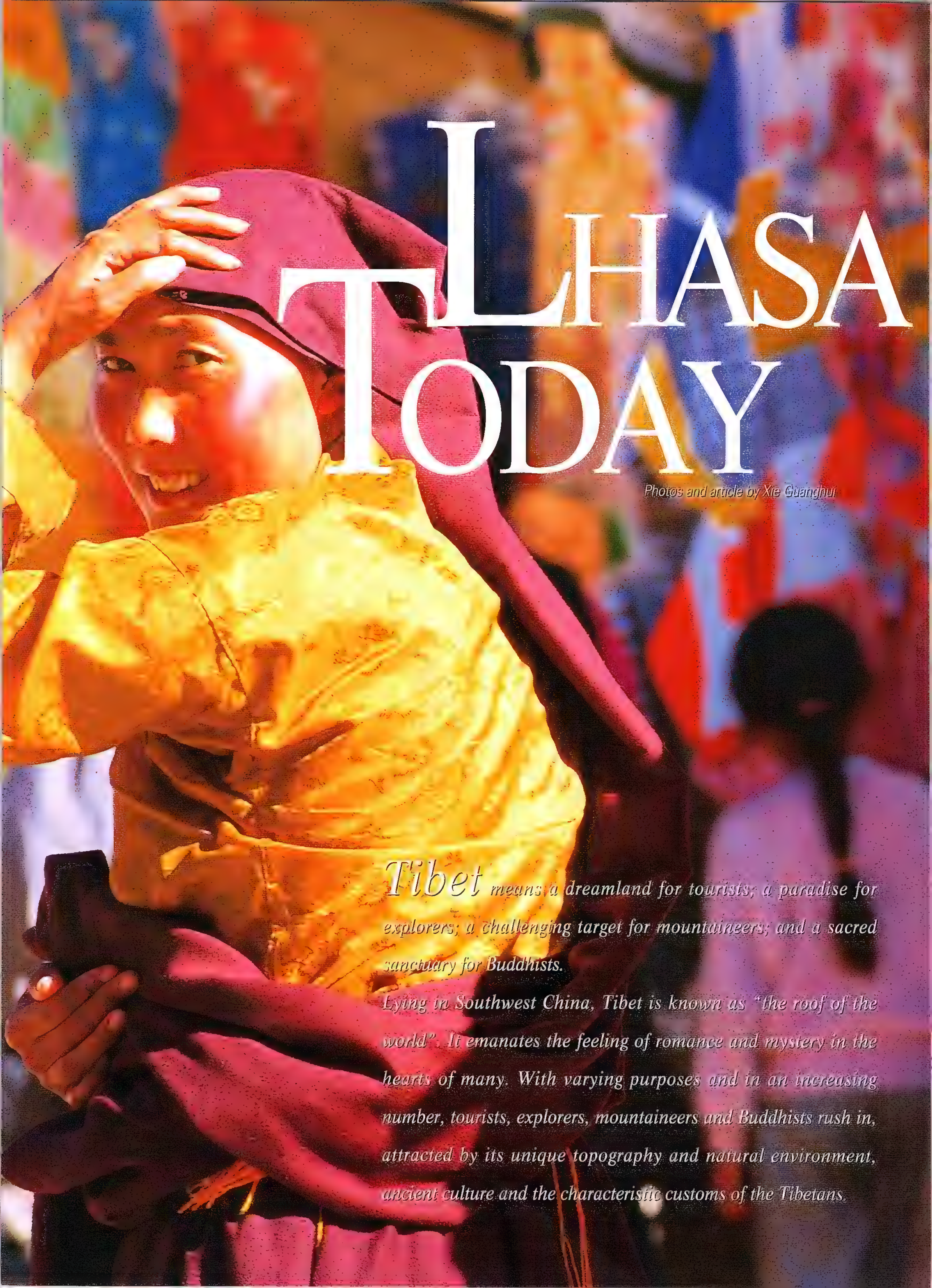


LHASA TODAY

Photos and article by Xie Guanghui

Tibet means a dreamland for tourists; a paradise for explorers; a challenging target for mountaineers; and a sacred sanctuary for Buddhists.

Lying in Southwest China, Tibet is known as "the roof of the world". It emanates the feeling of romance and mystery in the hearts of many. With varying purposes and in an increasing number, tourists, explorers, mountaineers and Buddhists rush in, attracted by its unique topography and natural environment, ancient culture and the characteristic customs of the Tibetans.

The air was fresh, and as the sunlight penetrated my body, I felt the ecstasy of its warmth.

The decision came at the last moment. I was to go to Tibet. How exciting!

A friend who had been there called to say that since it was my first trip to Tibet, I should definitely take the land route into Lhasa. He suggested that I choose from any of the four major highway routes leading into Tibet from Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai or Xinjiang. That way I could visit many fascinating historical sites, holy mountains, rivers and lakes, vast grasslands, no-man's-land, ruins of ancient kingdoms... He also stressed that I would need time to gradually adjust to being on the "Roof of the World", for the Tibet Autonomous Region sits at an altitude of about 4,000 metres or higher.

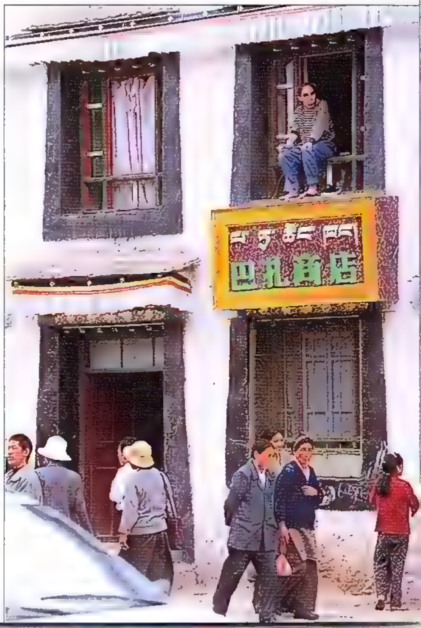
This was not to be, however, as I arrived late at night in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, only a few days before the Tibetan Shoton Festival. Without hesitation, I decided to go to Lhasa by air.

Early the next morning, I arrived at the Shuangliu Airport, awaiting my flight. There are four flights from Chengdu to Lhasa, all B757s and all in the morning, taking off every 10 minutes. The flight schedule is like this because in Tibet only in the early morning are the air currents stable. I wondered if any other place in the world had flights into the same destination following so closely one after the other.

LANDING ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

The plane quickly climbed up through the clouds, completely blocking sight of the ground below. My heart began to throb with excitement. Suddenly, a streak of sunlight penetrated the clouds and I could see the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, which resembled a silver thread meandering in and out of view. It is said that more than 3,000 men of the People's Liberation Army lost their lives building this 2,413-kilometre road through extremely hazardous terrain.

Of all the people who have travelled to Tibet over the centuries, no one has left as profound an influence on the region as Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Not much has been recorded in writing about her trip to Lhasa to marry the Tubo King Songtsan Gambo. However, one can imagine what an impressive marriage procession it must have been. Thousands of men and women formed the entourage, carrying an enormous amount of gold and silver, pearls and precious stones, silk and satin, and cases and cases of books on medicine, astronomy, the calendar and so on. This great cavalcade of horses and carriages departed from the Tang capital Chang'an (now Xi'an) and headed southwest for the Qinghai-Tibet



Previous page: Young nuns can be full of fun too.

1. **The Potala Palace is visible from almost every street in Lhasa.**
2. **This foreign tourist is using his window at the Tibetan-style Banak Shol Hotel as a balcony.**

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Lining the Beijing Road is an array of department stores, supermarkets, garment shops and restaurants offering a variety of cuisine in addition to Tibetan. Young women of Lhasa wear vests and leather mini-skirts, and use lipstick.

1. **Tourists dress up in Tibetan robes for photos on the roof of the Potala Palace.**
2. **These two Tibetans have come all the way from Qinghai Province to the holy city, Lhasa, to "welcome the Buddha".**
3. **The clothing and demeanour of these two young people demonstrates the pulse of modern-day Lhasa.**
4. **The Titanic sweeps Lhasa as it did other cities of the world.**

Plateau. They slept in tents, cooked outdoors, scaled snow-clad mountains and trudged through seemingly endless grasslands, overcoming untold hardships before arriving in Lhasa after three years on the trail.

Our plane landed at Lhasa's Gongga Airport in just over two hours. This was the "Roof of the World", pushed to a height of over 4,000 metres from the bottom of an ancient ocean tens of millions of years ago. I stretched and breathed in the highland air, feeling rather proud that I did not have any altitude sickness. But this self-confidence soon left me as I gasped for breath when I walked up the steps to collect my luggage. I followed the rest of the group and boarded the bus. The bus toiled along the upper reaches of the Lhasa River; we opened the windows to let in the sun and clean, fresh air. As the sunlight penetrated my body I felt the ecstasy of its warmth.

ENTERING LHASA

Two hours later, the bus entered the city of Lhasa and the weary travellers came alive, gazing excitedly everywhere. Suddenly, the bus turned on to Beijing Road Central and lo and behold, there, against a deep blue sky, loomed the Potala Palace, the glitter of its golden roofs in the sunlight almost blinding my eyes. A child cried out, "Look, Mummy, what a huge painting!" This was greeted by a round of laughter. A young Cantonese, having visited Tibet a few years ago, had sat emotionless throughout the drive. He now spoke in a surprised tone, "Hey, there was nothing but wild grass here before, now it's a square, and there's a fountain. The street has been widened, too." Seeing his newly shaved head, I asked, "Decided to be a monk in Tibet?" "Thought I might get by as a monk when we visit the monastery," he laughed.

The bus pulled to a stop in front of the CAAC Hotel. Immediately, a host of three-wheeled pedicabs swarmed around us. Several Belgian students and a French couple were quickly coaxed into riding them.

"Banak Shol Hotel?" the drivers asked. "Yes!" And off they went.

"The Banak Shol Hotel is typically Tibetan. And it's cheap, and clean," the Cantonese explained. The two of us shared a pedicab to the hotel with seven or eight other tricycles trailing behind.

The front desk at the hotel was already crowded with tourists registering, the colours of their skin as diversified as those of their passports. Just then the registrar shouted, "Only big rooms left! You'll have to share!" People suddenly pushed to get to the front, fearing no bed for the night.

After changing my clothes, ready to go out, an attendant, dressed in a Tibetan robe and carrying five hot water thermos bottles with each hand, walked into our shared room. "It is very easy for new arrivals, especially those coming in by plane, to get altitude sickness. The best thing to do is to stay put here for two days, in bed." It sounded very much like a doctor's advice, but I just could not fall asleep. So, equipped with a map, I slipped by her and went into the streets.

MODERNITY ENCROACHES ON TRADITION

With an urban area of only some 20 square kilometres, Lhasa is the smallest in size among the capitals of all the provinces and autonomous regions in China. The Beijing Road, the busiest street in Lhasa, runs right through the centre of town, passing in front of the Potala Palace. Lining the street is an array of department stores, supermarkets, garment shops, and restaurants offering a variety of cuisine in addition to Tibetan. Amidst the modern decor of the Qianhui Garment Shop, I talked with Miss Qianhui, the shop's boss. She had come a long way from Wenzhou City in Zhejiang Province on China's east coast. "There are lots of people from Wenzhou doing business here," she told me. "I remember when we girls first walked down the street wearing sleeveless dresses, the Lhasa girls would giggle at us. In the last few years, the number of tourists has increased and a lot of the local concepts have changed. Now, young Lhasa women wear vests and leather mini-skirts, and use lipstick, much like other cities."

The food market was incredibly well-stocked. Besides the traditional beef and mutton, and yak butter, there was a rich variety of vegetables. They all looked so good that they could only have been freshly picked — cucumbers with the yellow flower at the tip, tomatoes with the stalks, eggplants smooth and shiny and celery ever so tender. A Tibetan woman named Cholma, a retiree of the Lhasa People's Hospital who was there picking out her vegetables, told me, "We used to laugh at the Han Chinese for 'eating grass'. You see, we never had fresh vegetables here. Well, only a small amount shipped in and sold at very high prices. Then, many of our people suffered from eye diseases, so recently the government launched a 'vegetable basket' project in the suburban areas and introduced the new method of growing vegetables in plastic-sheet greenhouses. Now, look at these fresh, local tomatoes — we used to see them only in pictorials."

On Barkor Street West, a café with internet service has just opened; at a nightclub in the New Century Building, following the strong beat of rock and roll music, people dance their day away.

THE INTERNET MAKES ITS DEBUT IN LHASA

On Barkor Street West, a signboard on a two-story Tibetan-style building announces in English "Internet Service". This is Lhasa's first internet café which had just opened. Four computers were clicking away while several people waited in line to send off their e-mail. Wang Rongrong, the owner of the café and a recent graduate from the Sichuan United University, together with a few classmates, had opened an internet café in Chengdu. It did so well that they decided to start a chain café in Lhasa. "The fee for surfing on the internet is 20 yuan per hour," she said. "Anybody's welcome. The place is crowded with customers everyday." She called this "the fast food of the information age". Our conversation turned to the prospects of Lhasa's future development. She lifted her youthful face toward the ceiling, her bright eyes blinking. "There are so many attractions in Tibet. In the past, as we knew so little about them, everything seemed so mysterious. Now, with the internet, Tibet is uncovered..."

She seemed to be searching for the proper words, and then continued, "Tibet is a great tourist attraction, for one thing. Isn't it nice and cool now? Lhasa is a real good summer resort. And in the winter, it's only cold in the morning and night. As soon as the sun comes out, you'd feel hot with a down vest on." She passed me an album with pictures of Tibet. Turning over the pages, I definitely agreed with her. Where else can you find such a beautiful place? And to be right in the midst of it in person makes you feel absolutely sublime, a feeling you cannot get simply from the pictures.

DISCO DANCING IN LHASA

As night fell, the streets of Lhasa were ablaze with neon lights. In the nightclub in the New Century Building, several people had drifted onto the crescent dance floor, dancing to the rhythm of a soft, melodious tune. A waitress in the Manchu-style *qipao* lit the candles on our table and served us beer and drinks. At 11 p.m., the atmosphere changed. With the strong beat of rock and roll music, everybody rose to dance disco. A young Tibetan guide shouted into my ear, "The days when people go to the monasteries during the day and go to bed early at night are gone forever."

1. In Lhasa, nicknamed "The City of Sunshine", using solar energy to boil water is common practice.

2. As tourism develops in Tibet, some monks are beginning to study English on their own.

3. The square in front of the Potala Palace becomes a children's playground on weekends.

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JOKHANG MONASTERY

It was just approaching dawn. I headed for the Jokhang Monastery through the streets dampened by last night's rain. Already, from a distance, I could see the golden Dharma wheel and the two golden deer crouched in front of the monastery's golden roofs. Only a few people were walking about in the square. Two mulberry leaf burners, one on either side, were emitting white smoke which, along with sparks from the fire, gradually disappeared in the early morning mist.

The door of the main entrance was still closed, but the early arrivals were already prostrating themselves on the ground in the darkness of the portals. I watched a Tibetan pilgrim, perhaps in her 30s, agilely lifting both hands overhead until they met, then pulling the folded palms down to the chest, and the next moment throwing herself face down, flat on the ground. She repeated this movement over and over again, as so many had done before her. The ground around her had already been smoothed to such an extent that it shone with a strange light. Her long hair was parted from the top and braided into dozens of thin plaits which she then grouped together to make two thick pigtails. With red and green silk ribbons added to the ends, the pigtails looked even longer.

"Where have you come from?" I asked.

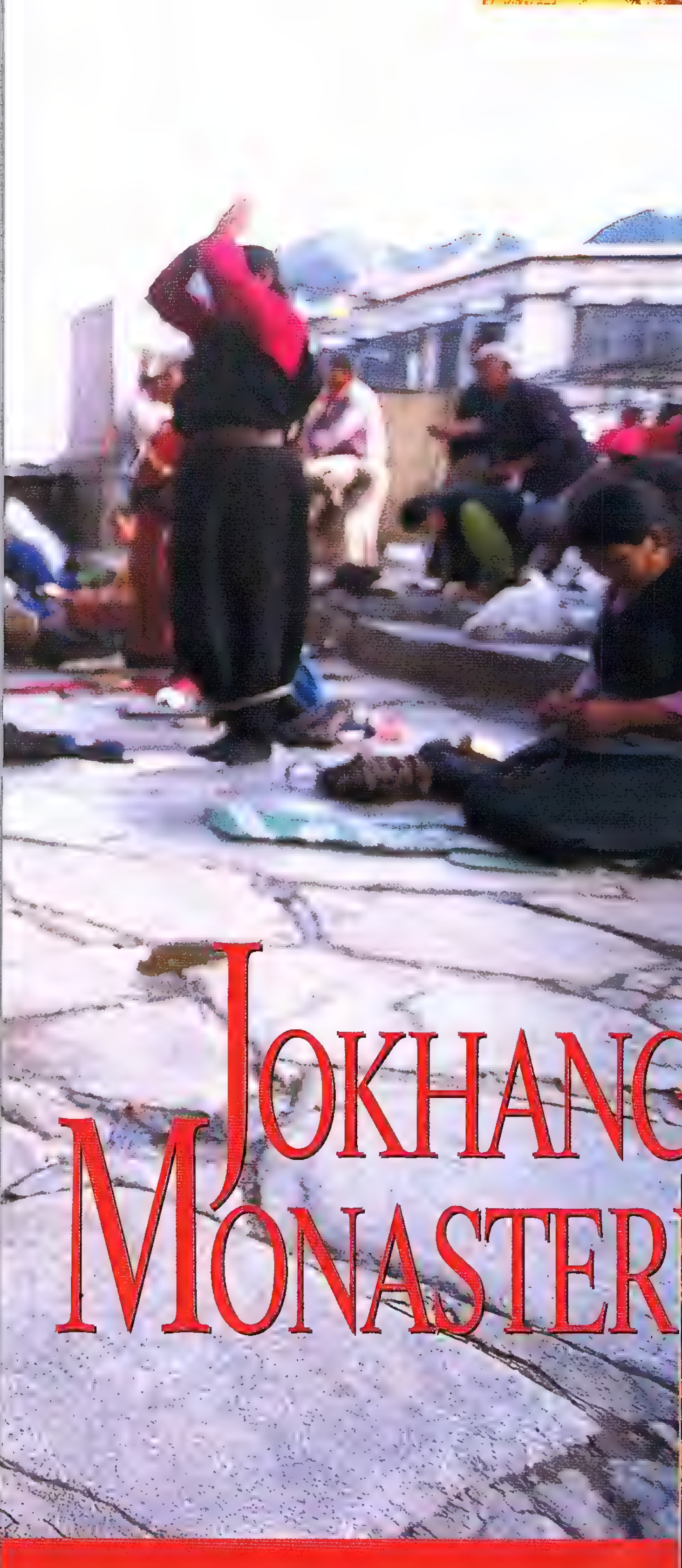
"Chamdo, in Sichuan."

"Did you prostrate yourself like this all the way here?"

She nodded, then continued using the unique Tibetan way of showing unbounded respect to the Buddha.

MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

When the morning glow turned the mountain peaks in the east a rose red, the entire roof of Jokhang was glittering



1. **Worshippers taking a rest after performing their prostration ritual**
2. **Sutra streamers sold on Barkor Street**
3. **Adding yak oil to the lamps in the Jokhang Monastery**

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The door of the main entrance of Jokhang was not yet open, but the early arrivals were already prostrating themselves on the ground. The slabs under them had been polished to such an extent that they shone a strange light in the early morning.

1. **A Lama in front of Jokhang Monastery**
2. **Buddhist followers prostrating themselves in worship in front of Jokhang Monastery**
3. **The entrances to almost all the monasteries in Tibet are resplendent.**
4. **Lamas of Jokhang Monastery counting the contributions from one day's worshippers.**

gold. A large truck pulled to a stop in front of the square and from it alighted a group of Tibetans who queued up at the left side of the portal and one by one started turning the huge prayer wheels in a clockwise direction. I found myself swept along with the crowd. Then the entrance door opened. After passing through a dim doorway, we were inside the monastery.

A young lama came after me and told me I must buy a ticket.

"Why? I didn't see any sign of admission charge." I was surprised and somewhat embarrassed.

"It is the rule that prayers don't need to pay, but visitors do."

Looking around, I realised I was the only visitor at that moment. Everybody else looked so devoted with a prayer wheel in one hand and an oil lamp in the other, eyes looking straight ahead as they entered the hall.

"When the Reverend Panchen Erdeni was alive, he urged all the monasteries in Tibet to feed themselves and not rely on government subsidy," the monk explained while handing me the receipt. "The entry charge is regarded as your contribution."

BARKOR STREET — THE CENTRAL PRAYER ROUTE

Jokhang Monastery was built in the mid-7th century, after Princess Wencheng arrived in Lhasa. The temple was ordered to be built on what was previously marshlands because she found that, by her geomacy observations, a female demon occupied the area, and must be subdued to avoid endangering the king's power.

The temple is in Tang-dynasty architectural style, with corbel brackets and inverted V beam frames. Its doors, pillars and beams are decorated with either paintings or bas-reliefs depicting flying apsaras, human figures, animals, birds, and flowers. In the centre of the Hall of the Buddha rests the seated statue of the 12-year-old Sakyamuni, brought to Tibet by Princess Wencheng from Chang'an, the Tang capital, when she came to marry Songstan Gambo.

The Buddha is portrayed with a gentle smile, narrow, curved eyebrows and wearing luxurious clothes — in the style of a typical Tang-dynasty sculpture. His left hand holding a bowl and his right hand on his knee, the young Buddha is a picture of benevolence. The statues of the Buddhist guardians and bodhisattvas standing behind him are just as vividly sculptured. I was prodded along as the pilgrims behind me pushed me forward, but I did follow their example and touched my

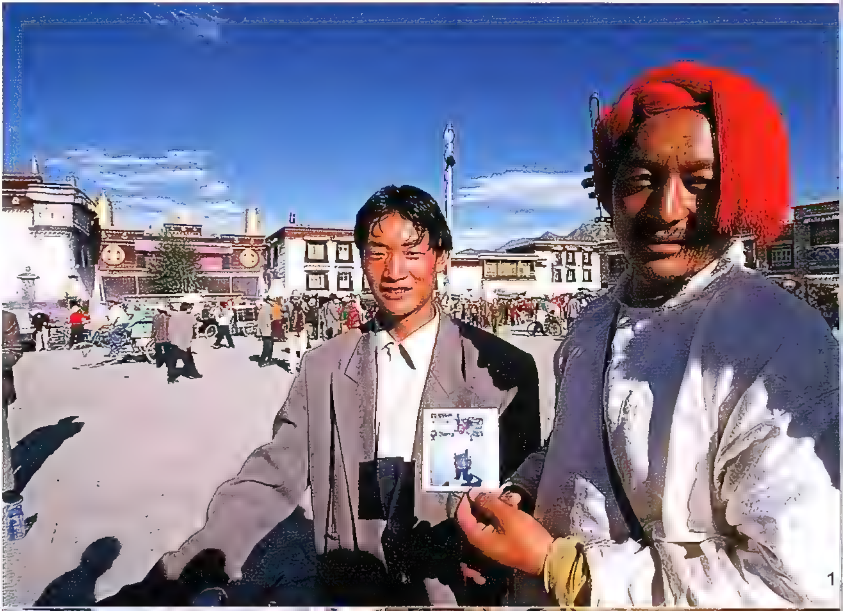
forehead against the Buddha's seat, put my palms together and muttered the protective phrase "om mani patime um" over and over again. Nevertheless I was quickly jostled out of the hall. "Why are there so many people today?" I asked one of the lamas. He replied that this was the eighth day of the month on the Tibetan calendar, the day for all devout Buddhists to pay homage to the Buddha, offering yak oil to keep the lamps burning.

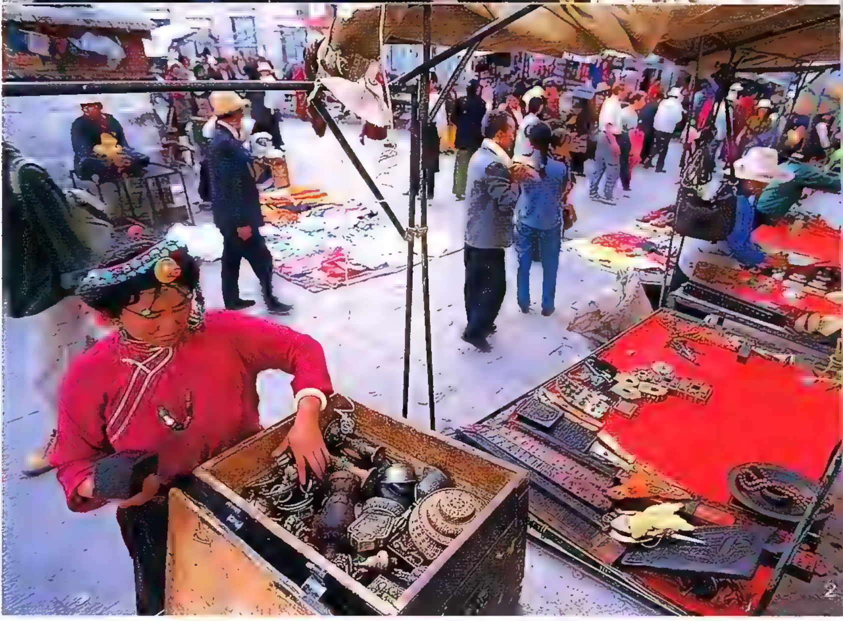
Barkor means the "central prayer route", a term extended from Nangkor, or "family prayer route" in Jokhang. It is like a huge revolving millstone, once you are drawn into the track you would follow its clockwise course automatically.

I proceeded upstairs. Both the balustrade and the steps were so oily that everyone had to be very careful not to slip. The Hall of the Dharma King was already filled with people. The statues of Songtsan Gambo, Princess Wencheng and Princess Bhributi, as well as those of Thonmi Sambhota and Gar Tongtsan are said to have been modelled on the characters themselves.

Walled in by the buildings is a rectangular courtyard surrounded by a corridor of prayer wheels, which is also called Thousand Buddha Corridor because of the murals of 1,000 Buddha images painted on the walls. Along the inner wall of this corridor is a row of prayer wheels. This is what is known as the Nangkor, or "family prayer route". I joined the others and walked the whole circle.

A single wall separates Jokhang Monastery from Barkor Street. Barkor means the "central prayer route". It is like a huge revolving millstone, once you are drawn into the track, you would follow its clockwise course automatically. Almost all the houses along the route are shops. To attract buyers, goods are placed in the middle of the road. They include old-fashioned jewellery, articles used for religious rituals, Tibetan knives, old coins, snuff bottles, Tibetan carpets, tangkas and other folk art objects. You can hear all kinds of accents from the vendors — Sichuan, Ningxia, Zhejiang, Gansu — mingled with that of local Lhasa vendors. A Tibetan girl ran over to me and offered me a pure white silk scarf — the *hata*. After buying it I found that just about every visitor in the street had one of these — the sign of a tourist.





DISTANT AND DEVOTED TRAVELLERS

As I walked along , every now and then some Tibetan girls would approach me to buy jewellery. They hung many pieces of them around their forehead, neck, or wrist to attract buyers. Visitors who ask the price without the intention of buying end up being followed for two or three blocks by vendors who do not give up.

I met three Tibetan pilgrims from neighbouring Qinghai Province. Each carried a small statue of Buddha at his chest. They had circled the Nangkor, they were now circling the Barkor, and they would circle the old Lhasa city, including the Potala Palace.

"The Ta'er Monastery in Qinghai is also very famous," I commented.

"Yes, but 'Lhasa' is the Tibetan word for 'Holy Land'."

1. A Kamba man with his own instant picture taken in front of Jokhang Monastery
2. Business begins on Barkor Street early in the morning.
3. Barkor Street is like a revolving millstone. Once you are drawn into it, you follow the crowd milling in a clockwise direction.
4. Barkor Street is both a circular prayer route and the busiest shopping centre of Lhasa.

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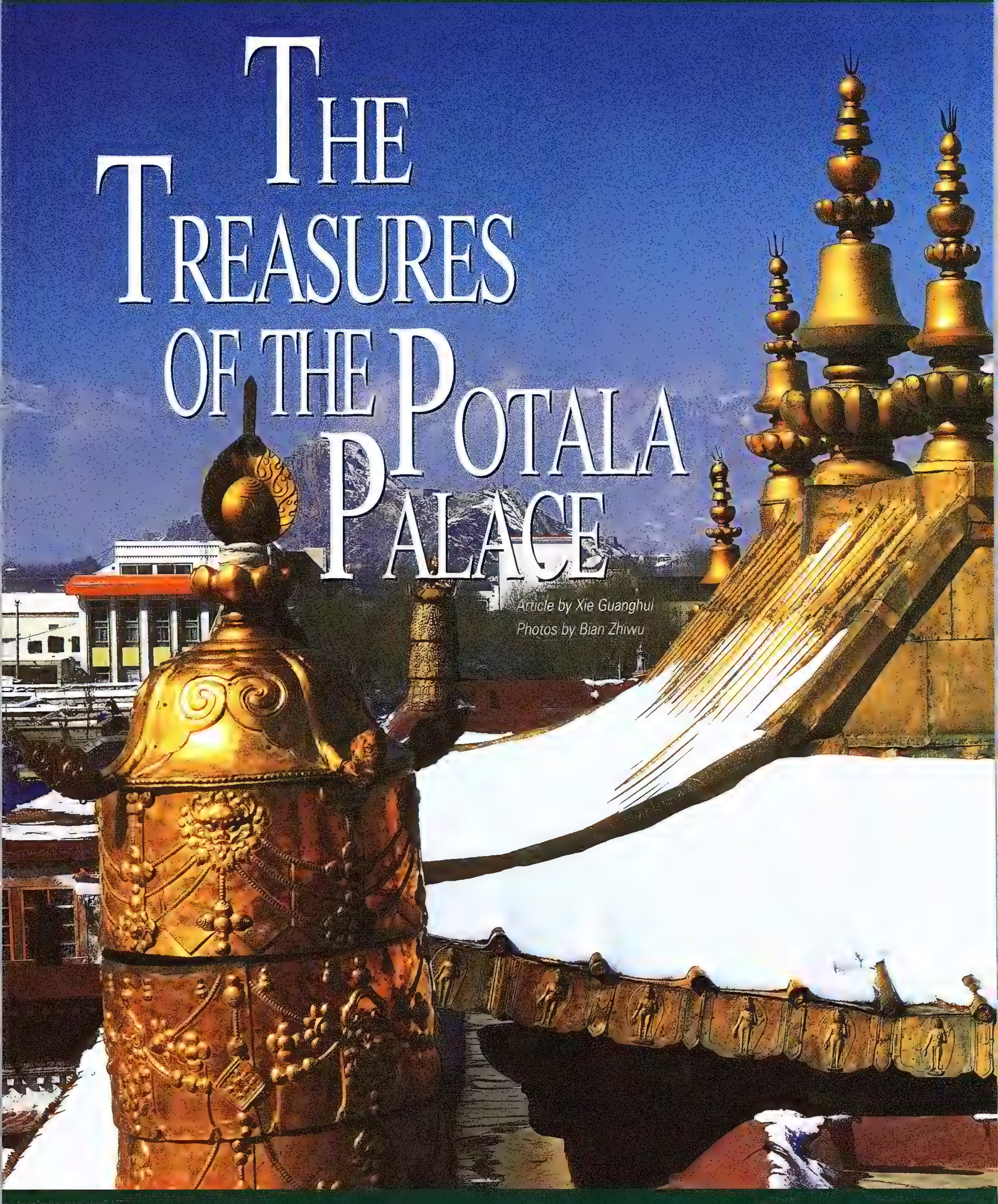
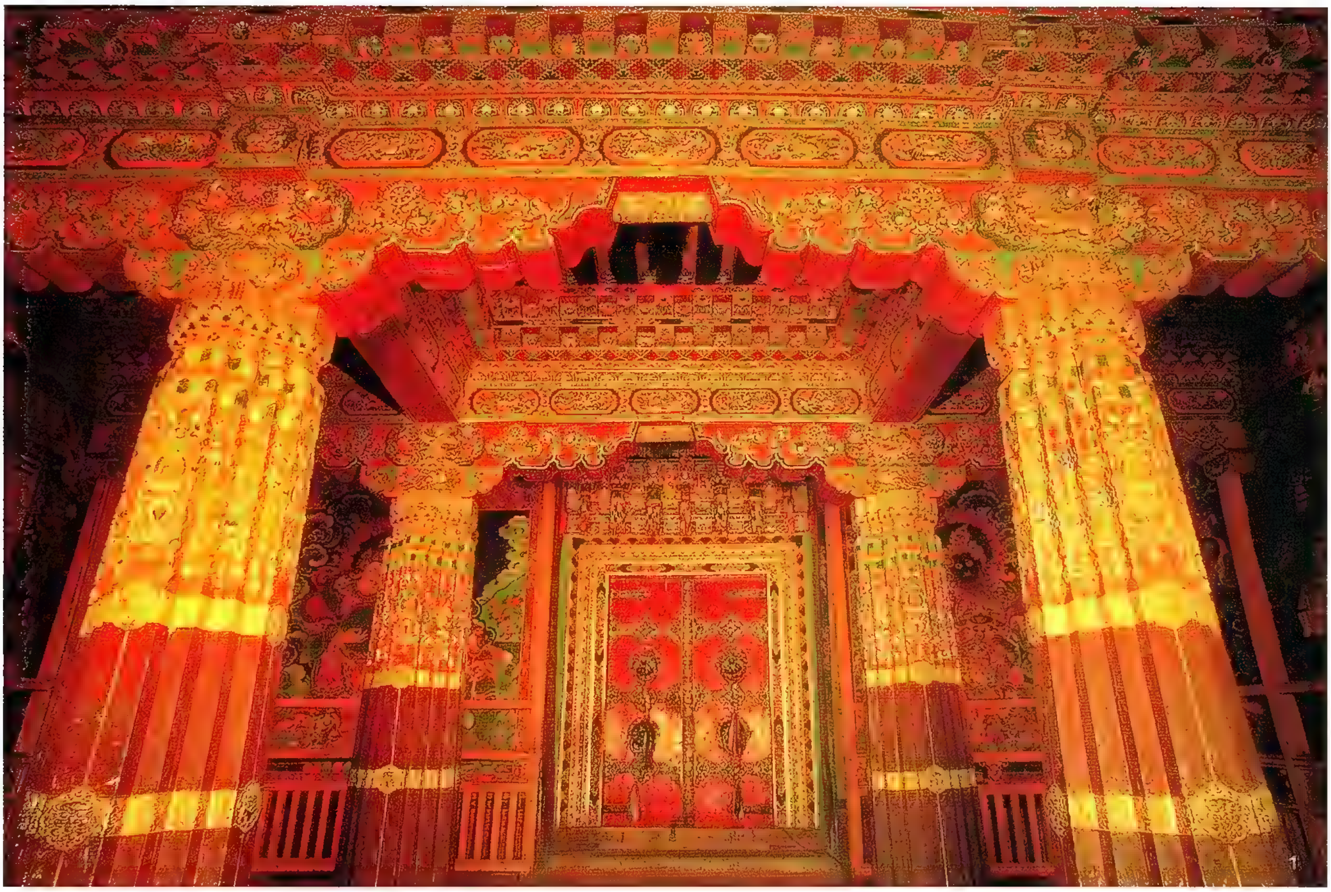
THE TREASURES OF THE POTALA PALACE

Article by Xie Guanghui

Photos by Bian Zhiwu





The city of Lhasa is dominated by the Potala Palace. Since Lhasa is a small city and the Potala is high up on a hilltop, the palace is visible from every angle far and near. When the sun rises like a glowing orange fireball in the east, the golden roofs of this 17th-century Tibetan-style palace seem to be aflame.

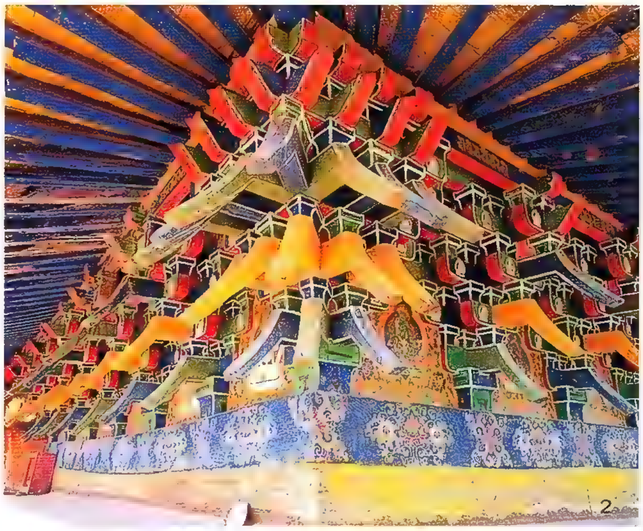
When I arrived at the entrance, tourist groups waving little flags were already waiting outside the palace wall. A young Tibetan woman guide in blue jeans and Nike shoes, and with a baseball cap on her head, mounted the steps and addressed her group.

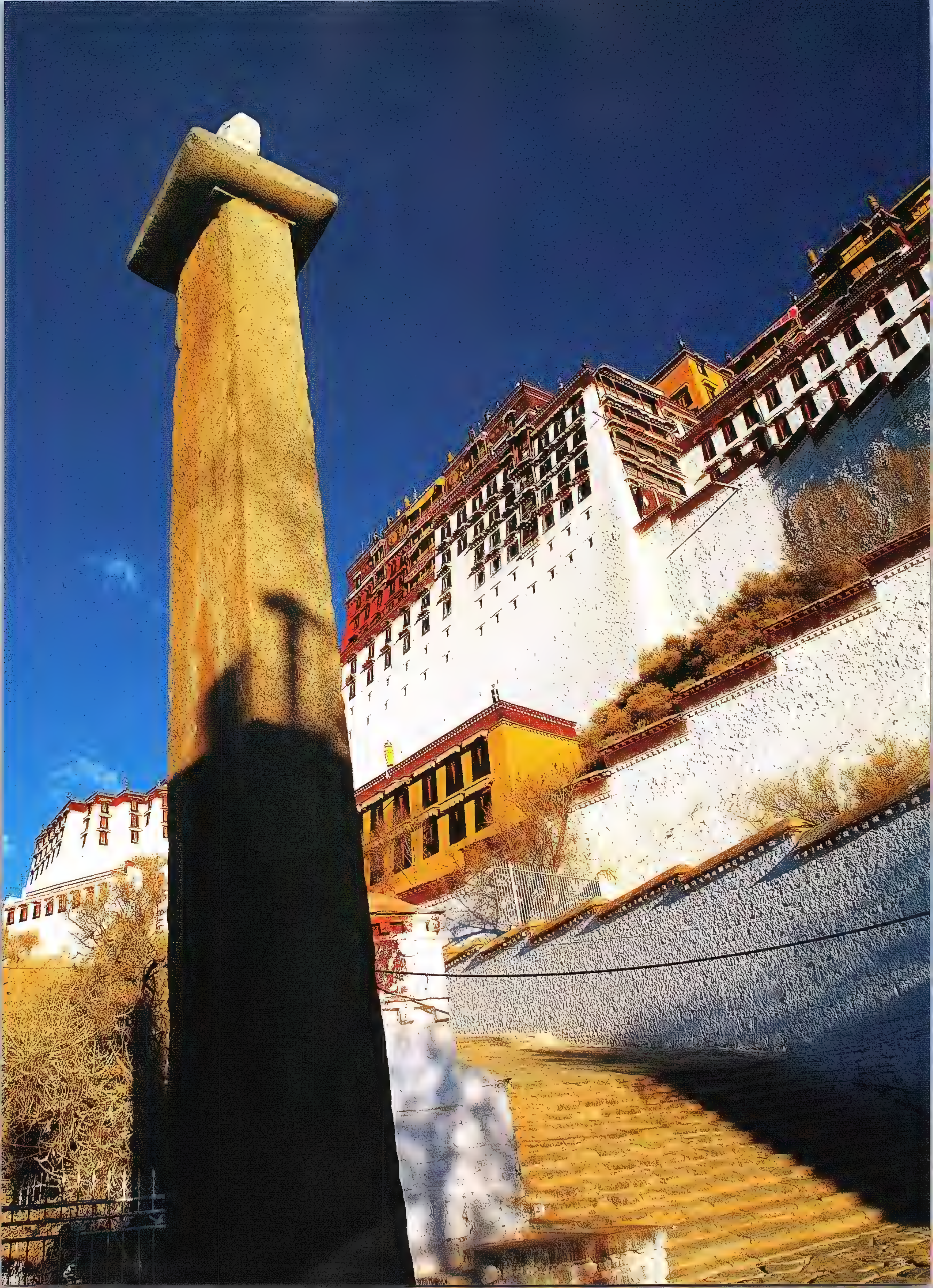
"The word *potala* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word for Mt. Potalaka, the sacred residence of Avalokitesvara in southern India. 'A boat that carries one away from the bitter sea of suffering' is its original meaning." In reply to questions as to why a religious leader would live in a palace, the guide went on to tell us some of the history of the palace: "In the 7th century, when the Tubo King Songtsan Gambo married Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty, he began to build the Potala as a palace and fortress on this hilltop. But the palace was seriously damaged by fire and lightning, then by war in the 9th century when the Tubo Kingdom disintegrated. In the mid-17th century, during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso, who was also a great scholar, politician and architect, the Potala Palace was rebuilt. According to Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama is the reincarnation of the Avalokitesvara, and since he was also the ruler of the land, naturally he lived and lectured at the Potala Palace."

Historically, Tibet was ruled by a theocracy for several centuries.

Previous page: View of the Potala Palace from the golden roof of Jokhang Monastery

1. **The portal of the White Palace is a structure with four columns and eight beams. Carved on top of each of the four columns are either a tiger, a lion, a roc or a dragon. There are also wooden sculptures of the eight great Buddhist pharmacists on the pillars. These are reproductions made during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.**
2. **The brackets supporting the golden roofs consist of five layers of brackets in the shape of elephant's trunk and seven layers in the shape of a pig's nose. These serve to diffuse the force of the wind. For this reason, never has a golden roof been blown off by strong winds.**
3. **The Red Palace and the White Palace — the two major components of the Potala**





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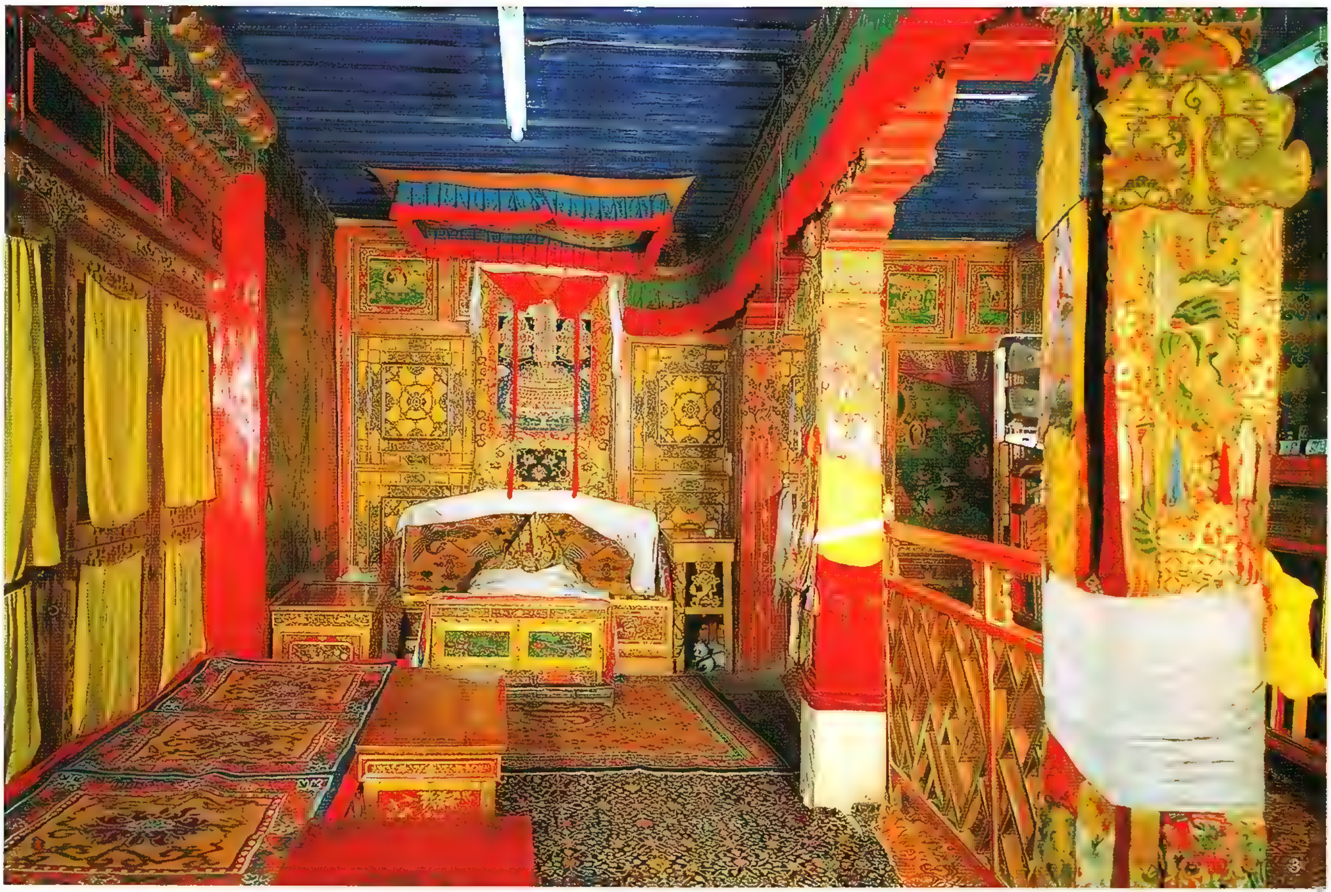
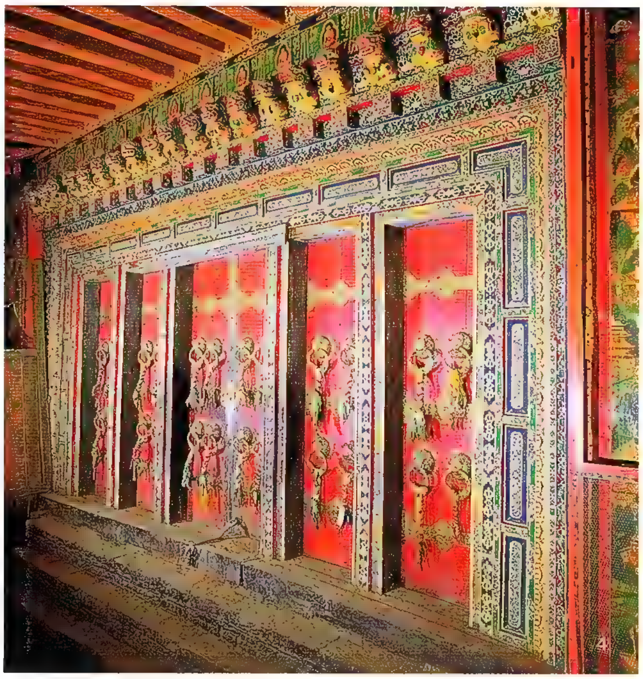


1. The awe-inspiring roofs of the Potala Palace
2. The doors and windows of the Potala Palace are in typical Tibetan style.
3. The Terraced Palace Hall in the Red Palace
4. There are five panels for the main entrance door to the Hall of the Fifth Dalai Lama's Stupa. They represent the Five-Dhyani Buddha, the five mental powers, the five wisdoms and the five ways of life. These door panels are adorned with exquisitely-made iron loops and door rings engraved with golden designs.



Religious rule was consolidated by the Fifth Dalai Lama, head of the Yellow Hat (Gelugpa) Sect of Buddhism. With the aid of the Mongolians, he suppressed his rivals and gathered the whole of Tibet under his rule. The Potala was both a sacred centre of Buddhism and the seat of the region's highest government authority. Ever since the Fifth Dalai Lama, all subsequent Dalai Lamas have carried out their government and religious activities at the palace.

The guide turned and proceeded to climb up the zigzag stone steps leading up to the palace. Many tourists in my group started bounding up, forgetting the 3,600-metre altitude, but quickly found themselves short of breath, with shoes like lead weights.

THE RED AND WHITE PALACES

The majestic 13-storey complex of the Potala towers 110 metres high on the southern slope of the hill, and is about 500 metres across from east to west and 100 metres from north to south. There are two major sections — the White Palace and the Red Palace — so named because of the colour of their walls. In front of the portal of the White Palace are three small wooden ladders. At this point, the guide turned and said, "Attention, please. Be sure you use only the two ladders on the sides. The wider, middle one was exclusively for the use of the Dalai Lama and the Qing Dynasty's Minister in Tibet."

The murals on the walls of the portal depict scenes of the construction of the Potala Palace and the Jokhang Monastery during

the 7th century, and the story of the marriage of the Tang Princess Wencheng to the Tubo King, Songtsan Gambo. Painted on the southern wall is the imperial mandate conferring the title of Fifth Dalai Lama to Lobsang Gyatso, then head of the local regime, marking the beginning of theocracy in Tibet in the 17th century .

The White Palace was where the Dalai Lamas lived and tended to secular affairs. The top level consists of the east and west Hall of Sunshine, the West Hall of Sunshine being the bedroom of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the East Hall of Sunshine that of the Fourteenth. Beneath these two is the East Main Hall with the Dalai Lama's throne, over which hangs a huge placard with four big characters in Han Chinese, *Zhen Xi Sui Jiang*, meaning "Flourishing of Buddhism, Peace in the Border Region," with its seal saying "in the imperial handwriting of Emperor Tongzhi". Ever since the Fifth Dalai Lama, this room was used for the ceremony of enthronement and assumption of office for each Dalai Lama, with the Qing-dynasty Minister presiding.

The Red Palace, built after the passing of the Fifth Dalai Lama, was used more for purely religious purposes. The red outer walls were a mixture of benba grass and a special kind of red clay. Inside the palace are the hall devoted to the stupas of the various Dalai Lamas and the Hall of the Buddha. The stupa of the Fifth Dalai is as tall as a four- or five-storey building. The guide informed us that, "the body of the Fifth Dalai inside the stupa was preserved by dehydration and smearing with perfume and saffron. More than 3,400 kilograms of gold were used for the gold-leaf covering the stupa and 1,500 diamonds, pearls, agates and pieces of jadeite inlaid in it. The gold lanterns and bowls, and the jade and porcelain objects on the offering table are all originals."

The last of the eight stupas to be built in the palace is that of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Local Tibetans revere him for his achievements, regarding him on a par with the Fifth Dalai Lama, and therefore built his stupa on a scale only less than a metre shorter than the Fifth Dalai Lama's. However, the gold expended for the gold-leaf was much less — only 560 kilograms. Among the murals depicting his activities is one showing him having an audience with the Empress Dowager Cixi and Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty in 1908. On the book shelves stocked with Buddhist scriptures which line the walls, is a complete collection of the Lhasa edition of the *Ganjur*, a Buddhism scripture printed under the auspices of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. Also in this hall is a mandala (terraced palace) inlaid with up to 20,000 pearls, corals, agates and other precious stones.

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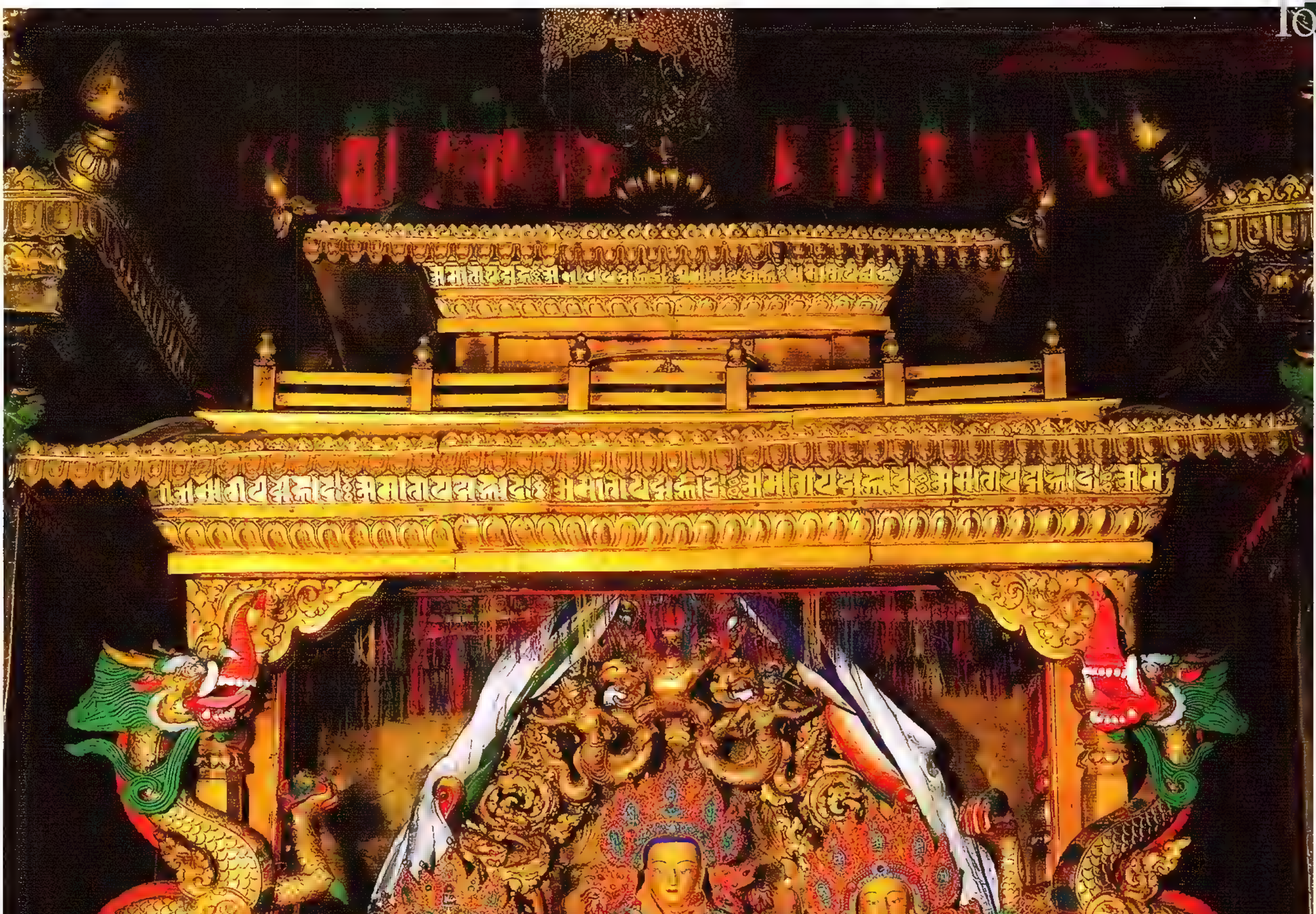

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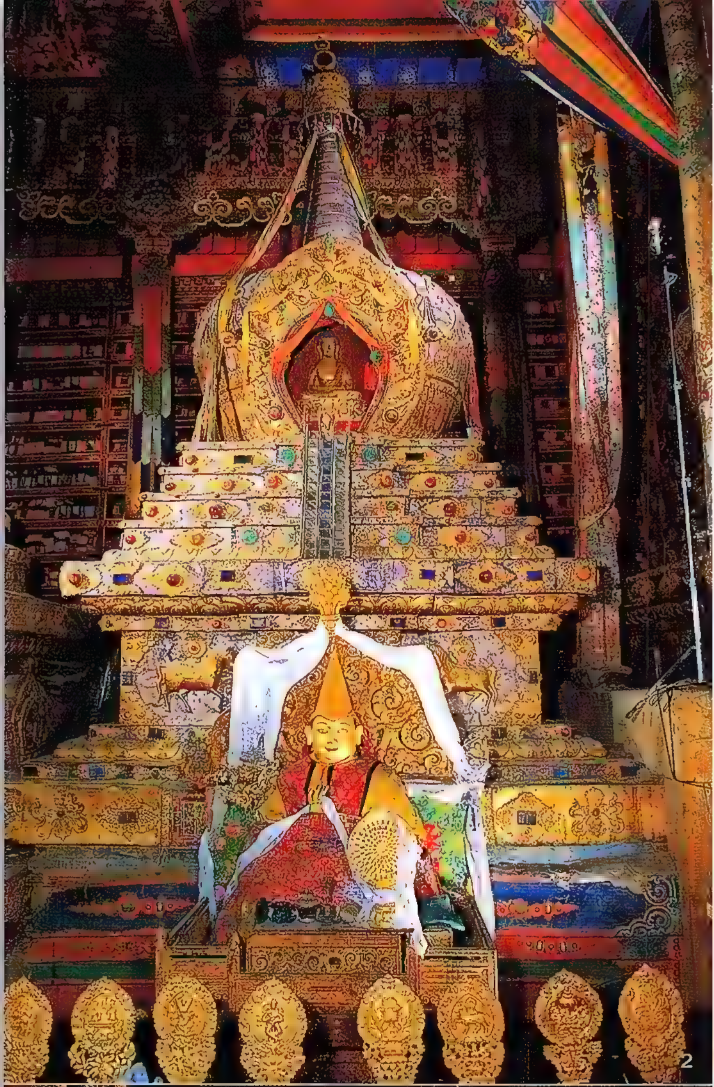
Previous page: The Western Main Hall is where major political and religious activities take place. It has on each of its four sides a Hall of the Buddha. The pillars and beams are carved with interesting designs modelled on the Wheel of Time Terraced Palace. Their base colours are painted with four different precious minerals: turquoise (east), coral (south), gold (west) and pearl (north), making the hall all the more magnificent and splendid.

1. Two main sculptures in the Ancestral Hall in the Red Palace: a gold statue of the 12-year-old Sakyamuni (left) and that of the Fifth Dalai Lama
2. Princess Wencheng
3. The Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara with her thousand hands
4. Songtsan Gambo, King of Tubo
5. The shrine inside the Hall of the Boddhisattva Avalokitesvara in the Red Palace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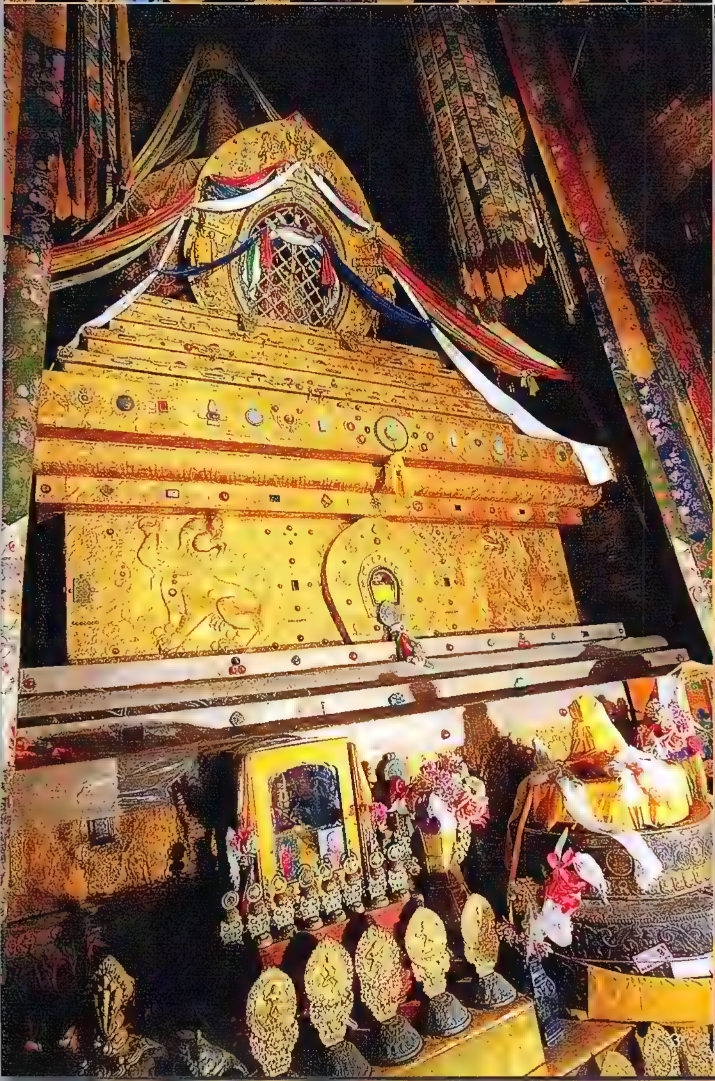
HALL OF THE WHEEL OF TIME

"There are numerous mandalas in the Potala Palace," said the guide. "Another which you must see, is in the Duikorlhakang, or the Hall of the Wheel of Time, on the third floor of the Red Palace." We were astounded as soon as we stepped into the Hall. There before us was a huge "terraced palace" carved out of wood, depicting what an ideal Buddhist world would be like. The sculptor had done a remarkable job, bringing the scene alive, so that for a Buddhist believer, time and space would be meaningless in such a world of peace and tranquillity.

The Fawandong, or Cave of the Dharma King, is on the second floor of the Red Palace. The atmosphere inside is quite mysterious with the yak cream oil lamps in the pilgrims' hands flickering in the dark. The corridor is so narrow that it allows only one queue of visitors going in, and those who passed through exit by a different way. In this cavern, Songtsan Gambo is seen, seated in his throne, accompanied on either side by a white-robed monk and an official in Tibetan

1. **The spectacular decoration and ornaments at the top of the stupa of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama**
2. **This tower named Descent from Sura was built in commemoration of the Buddha's descent from Heaven to the Kingdom of Shangni at the age of 57, on the 22nd day of the ninth month. The four-storey high, square tower of silver has a staircase in the middle.**
3. **In the stupa containing the body of the Fifth Dalai Lama, there are also relics of Sakyamuni and teeth of Tsongkhapa. The entire stupa, in the shape of a bodhi tree, is inlaid with tens of thousands of precious stones.**
4. **The stupas of the seventh, eighth and ninth Dalai Lamas are similar in style but smaller in size.**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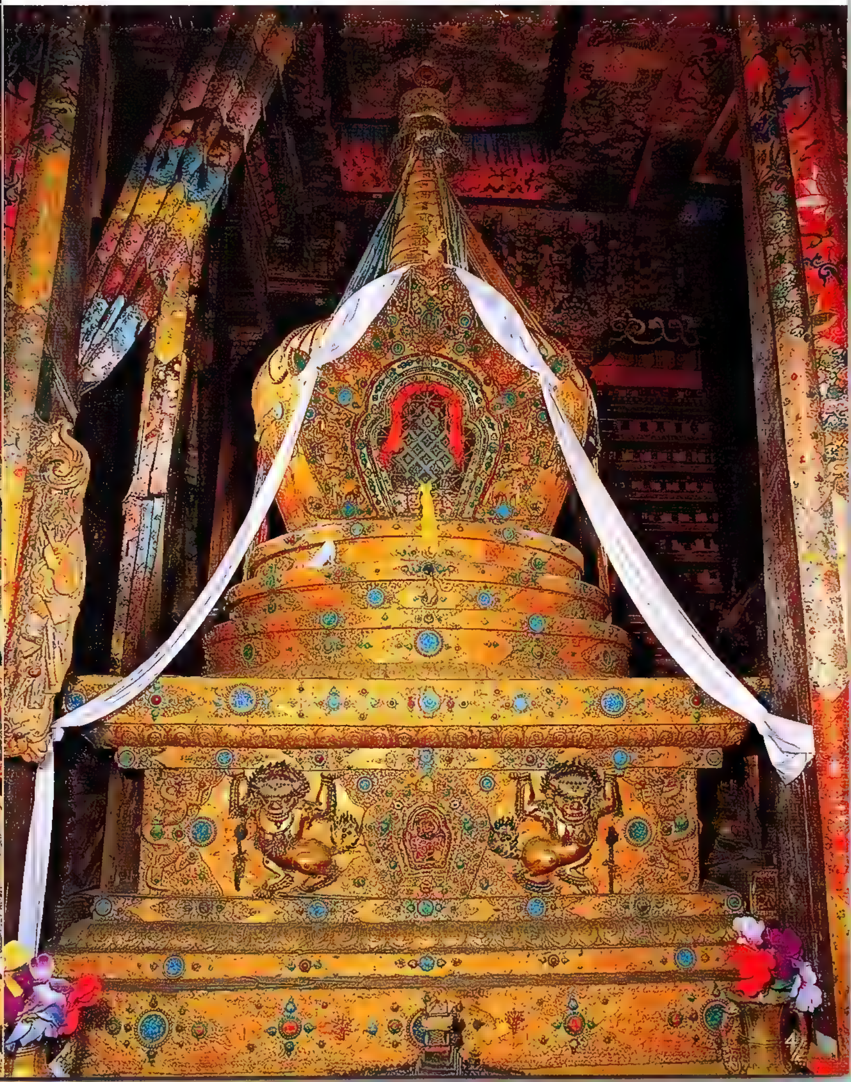
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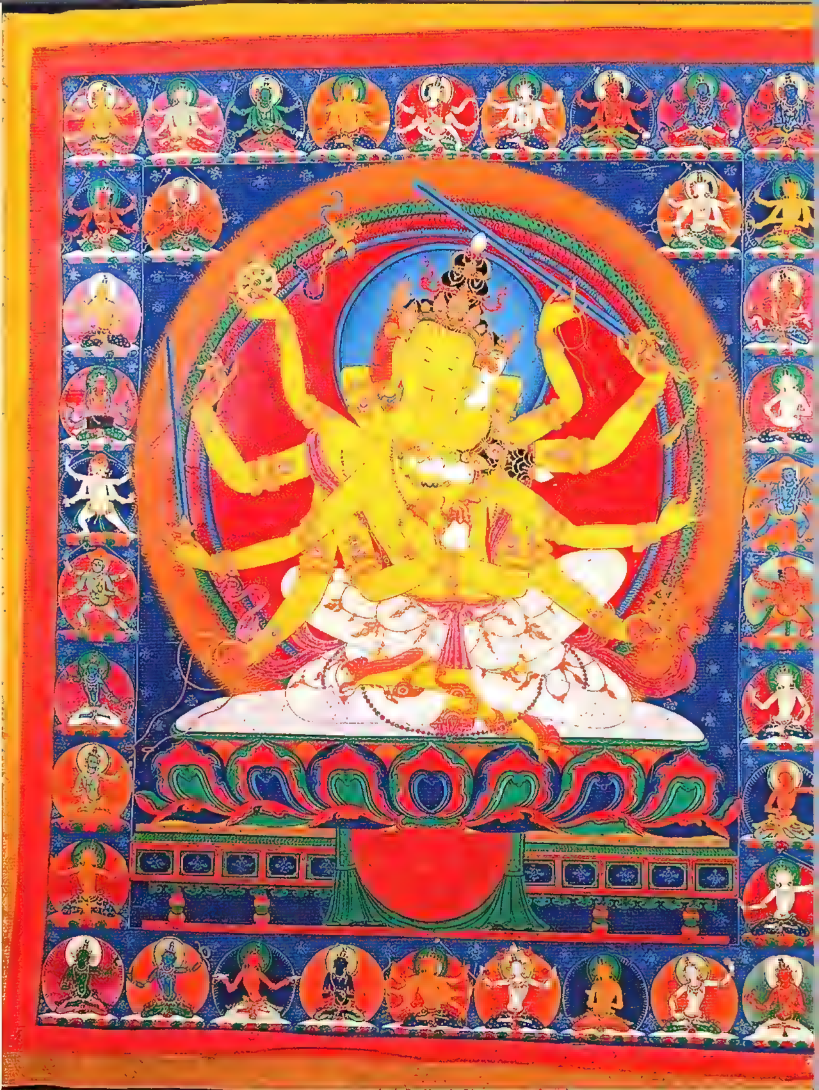
costume, representing Thonmi Sambhota who invented the Tibetan written language, and Gar Tongtsan, an extraordinarily wise and talented man. Seated further to Songtsan Gambo's left is a sculpture of Princess Wencheng, dressed in Tang costume, an image of grace and dignity.

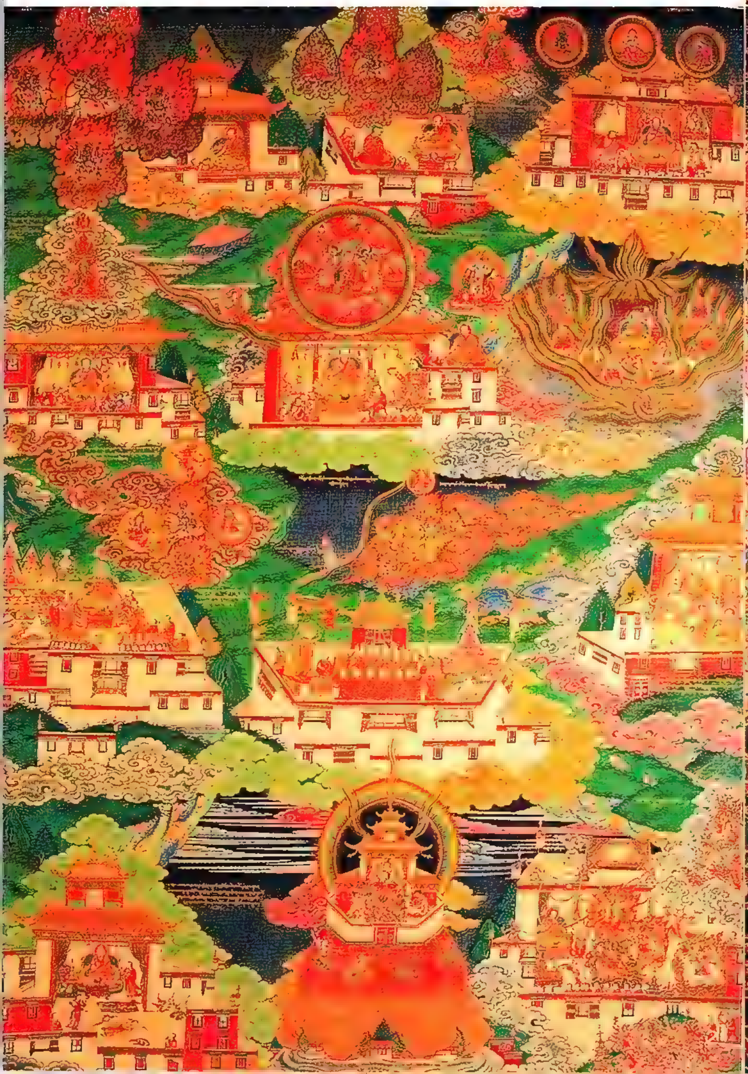
Over and above Fawangdong is the Hall of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

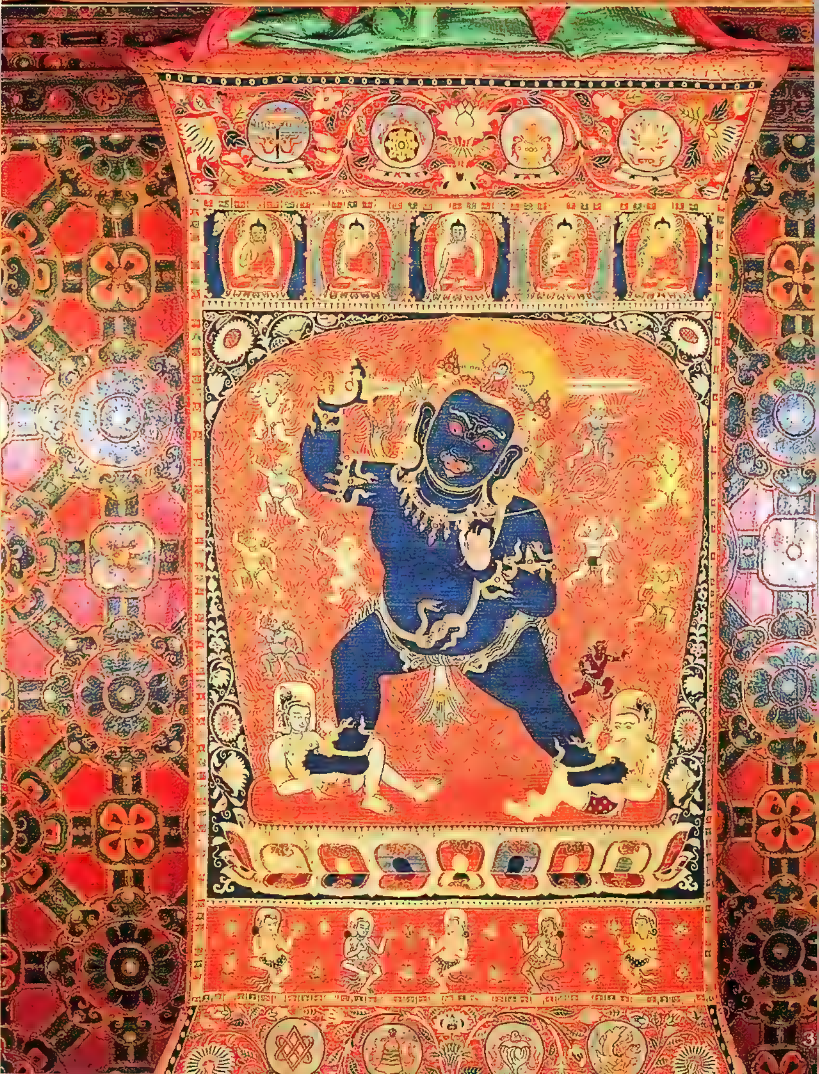
THE MYSTERY OF THE SIXTH DALAI LAMA'S STUPA

The Three Realms is a hall located at the very top level of the Red Palace. The Gandaingyai Hall to the west used to be where the Sixth Dalai Lama lectured on Buddhism. The hall contains his throne and lecture rostrum and the walls are covered with 1,000 niches, containing the same number of Buddha statuettes.

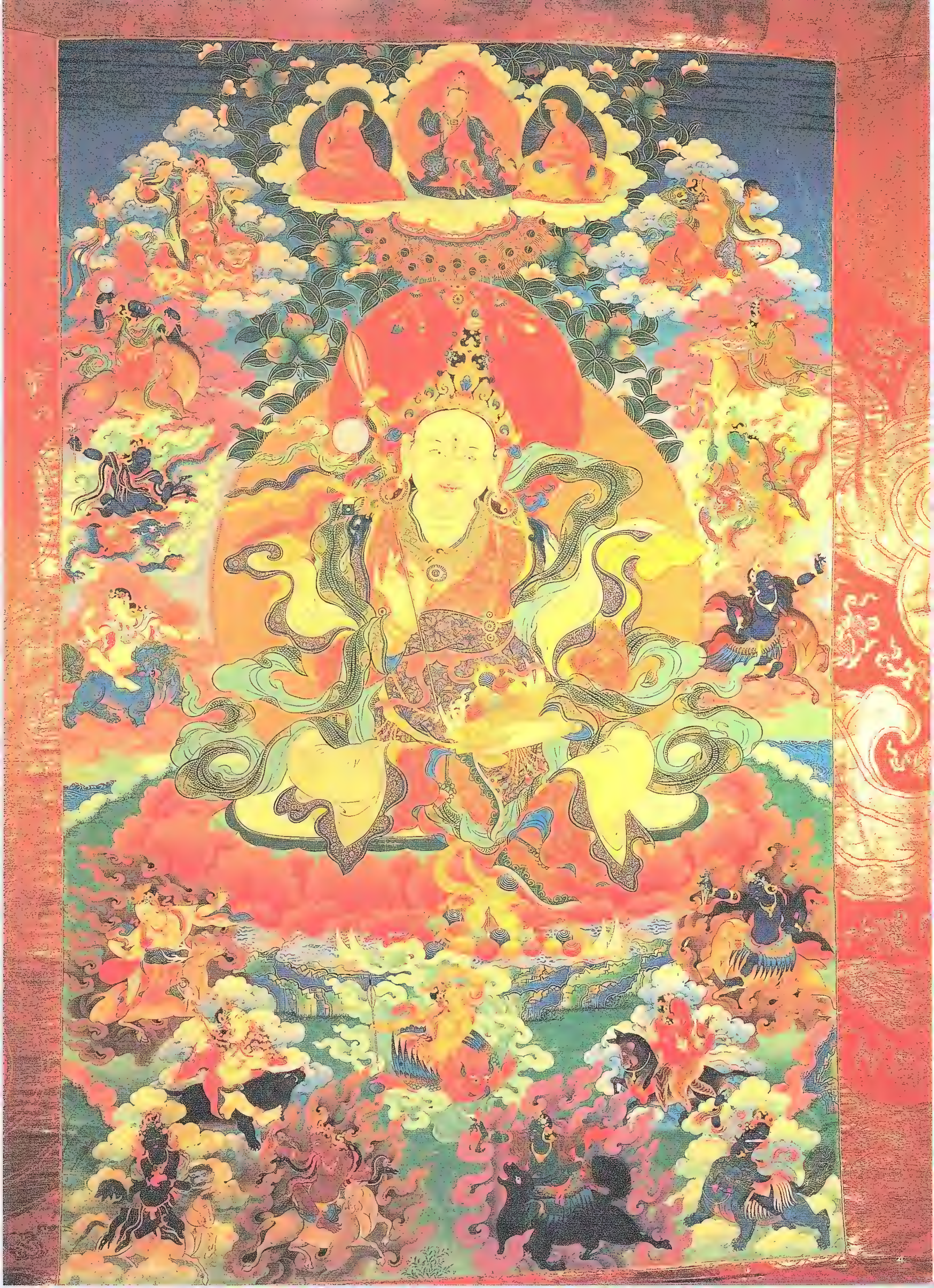
"This is the only place in the Potala Palace where you can find traces of the Sixth Dalai Lama," the guide told us, not without some regret. "What about his stupa? Where is

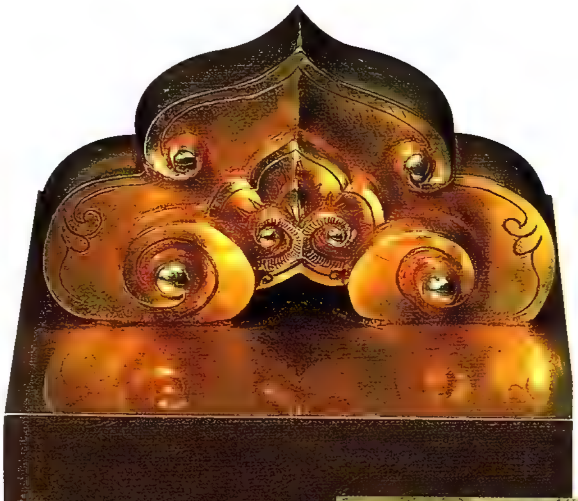


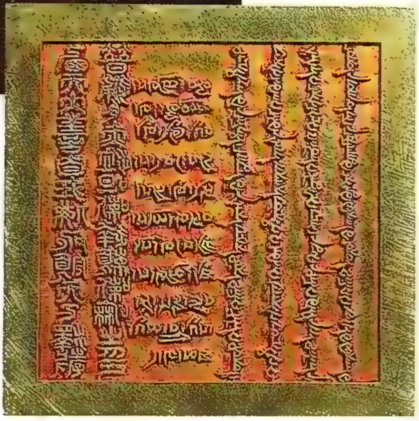




1. **Gsang-dus-rao-rje, the Buddha worshipped by the Gelugpa Sect of Buddhism, with multi-heads and multi-arms, holds in his hands a bell and a pestle, and the Dharma wheel. He is surrounded by 35 gods. This tangka is a work of the Qenze school.**
2. **A tangka of Padmasambhava**
3. **A Song-dynasty tangka of the angry king held motionless**
4. **Celestial being of good fortune in a Qing-dynasty tangka**

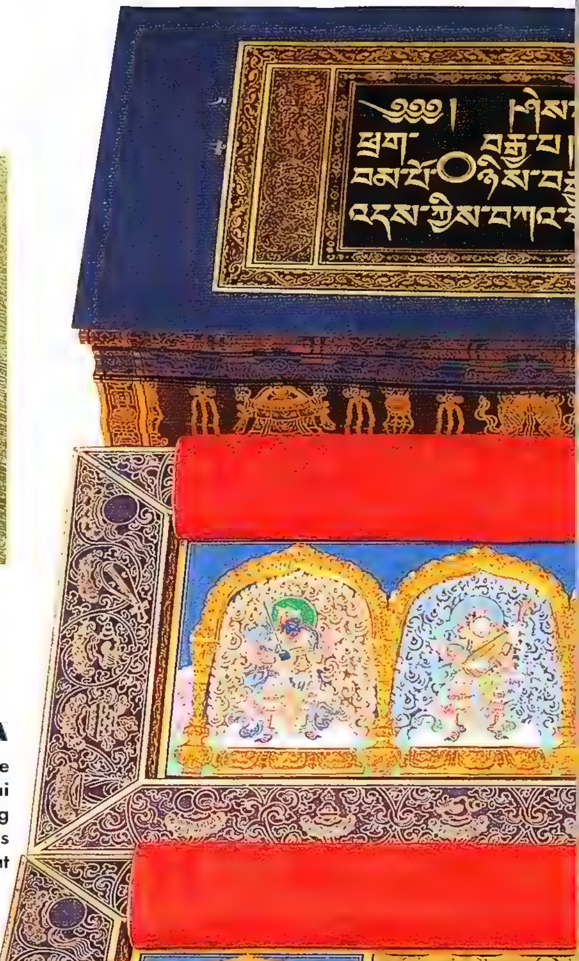






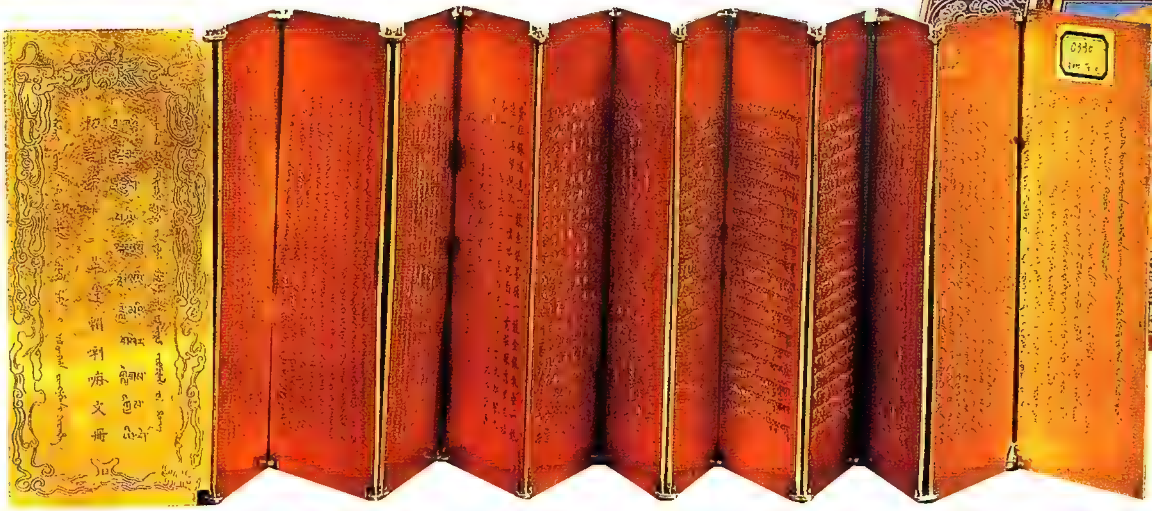
A GOLDEN SEAL AND A GOLDEN-LEAF ALBUM

From the Fifth Dalai Lama on, each Dalai Lama was conferred the holy title by the central government of the Qing Dynasty and was granted a Golden Seal and a Golden-leaf Album. The seal granted to the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1652 bears the inscription "The Seal of the Dalai Lama, Buddha of Great Compassion in the West, Leader of the Buddhist Faith Beneath the Sky, Holder of the Vajra", carved in the Manchurian, Han Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian languages.



TRIPITAKA

The Tripitaka, copied with gold ink, includes the *Prajnapramita* granted to the Seventh Dalai Lama by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty during the 18th century. Its first page is devoted to a colour painting of the Four Great Deva Kings.



GOLDEN-LEAF ALBUM GRANTED TO THE ELEVENTH DALAI LAMA

The Golden-leaf Album conferred to the Eleventh Dalai Lama by Emperor Daoguang of the Qing Dynasty which is 23.2 cm long, 9.9 cm wide and 0.2 cm thick. The album bears the carved inscription "Golden-leaf Album Granted to the Eleventh Dalai Lama" in four languages, Manchurian, Han Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian.

SCRIPTURES COPIED ON PATTRA

At present, only a few monasteries in Tibet possess the scriptures copied on pattra. These are among the treasured possessions of the Potala Palace.

it?" someone in our group asked.

She cleared her throat and said quite frankly that the Sixth Dalai Lama, by the name of Tsangyang Gyatso, does not have a stupa. He was a very talented young poet, she said, who cared more for his true love than for his position. It is said that once, during a heavy snowfall, he sat there, appearing to be reciting the sutra, but in fact composing a poem:

I tried hard to picture the respectful image of my Master,
But it never appeared.
What I kept seeing so vividly instead,
Was the face of my beloved.

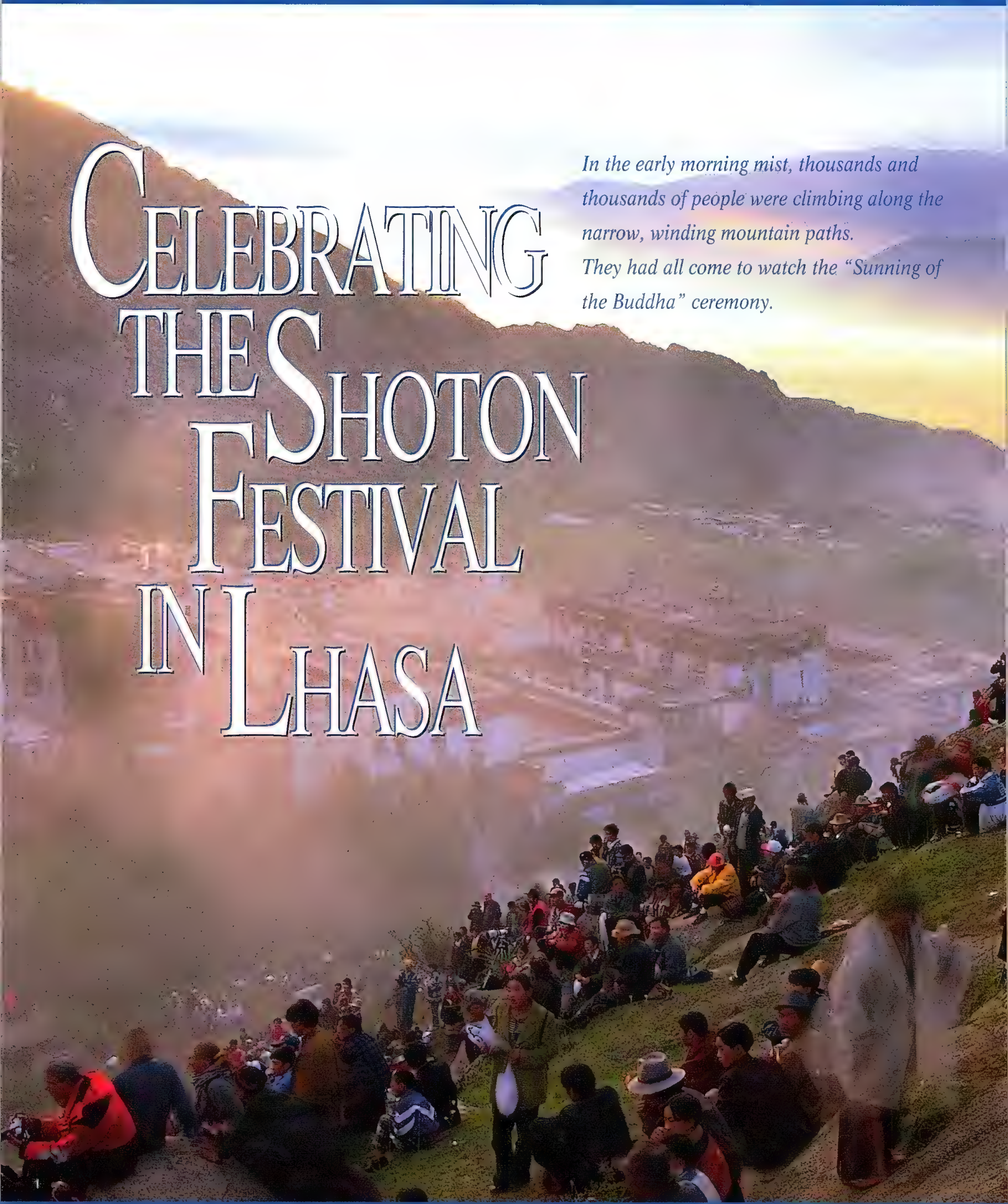
That night, he changed into layman's clothes and slipped out of the Potala Palace from the rear gate to meet his love. In the early morning, his footprints were discovered in the snow. In the end, Tsangyang Gyatso was exiled. Where he died is still a mystery even to this day.

Then, a monk hurried into the hall. It turned out that one of the tourists taking photos inside had been caught, unknowingly, by a hidden camera. The lama quickly pointed out the sign on the door in Chinese and English notifying that permission and payment is required before taking photos and videos, and so the tourist had no choice but to pay a fine. He was in fact lucky not to have his film confiscated.

As I left behind the magnificence of the Potala Palace and all of its treasures, I realised that I had just retread the steps of many who had come before me, tourists and pilgrims alike, in an enlightening discovery of this unique place on the "Roof of the World".

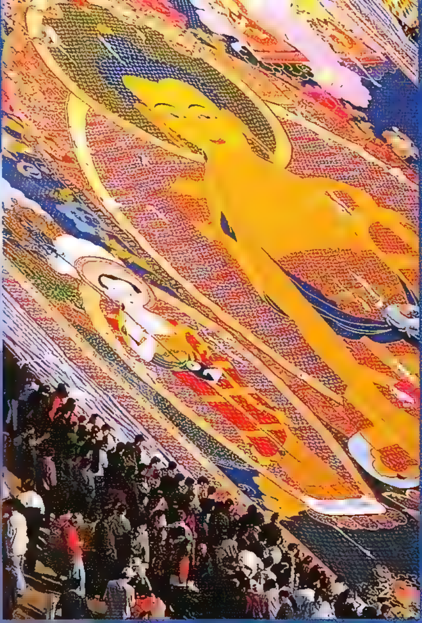
YAMANTAKA

Gilded bronze statue of the Eight-Petalled Lotus Yamantaka



CELEBRATING THE SHOTON FESTIVAL IN LHASA

In the early morning mist, thousands and thousands of people were climbing along the narrow, winding mountain paths. They had all come to watch the "Sunning of the Buddha" ceremony.



Lhasa's streets were suddenly filled with a boisterous atmosphere on the eve of the Shoton Festival. Shoton is the Tibetan word for "offering yoghurt". This festival takes place on the first day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar, on the day the Fifth Dalai Lama had his tonsure (shaving of the head). Thousands of Buddhist devotees from all over Tibet come to Lhasa to worship and offer yoghurt to the lamas. It is also a good opportunity to watch Tibetan operas.

In the dim light of the street lamps, crowds were gathering as people poured out of their homes in the early morning. As the human torrent moved towards the Drepung Monastery there was an air of solemnity and holiness in the atmosphere. By the time we reached the village at the foot of the hill on which the Monastery rested, the highway had been sealed to all vehicles. People began climbing the hill as an enormous mass, the sound of their tramping and voices resounding in the Lhasa River valley. They had all come to watch the "Sunning of the Buddha" ceremony. What a spectacular sight it was!

PRAYERS LIKE A ROARING SEA

As dawn broke out beyond the mountain peaks, the foot of the hill was already a sea of worshippers.

1. Crowds waiting to see the "Sunning of the Buddha" ceremony as dawn approaches
2. Sunning the Buddha at Drepung Monastery early on the day of the annual Shoton Festival
3. Monks of Drepung Monastery can watch the ceremony from the monastery's rooftop.

Tourists, however, flocked to the slopes to watch. Suddenly, monks on the roof of a three-storey palace building started blowing their long, silver horns. All across the ravine, people started burning fragrant incense, and threw *tsamba* (barley) and holy water into the air. Purplish smoke rose up and spread around, threatening to fill the entire sky. I was impatiently stretching my neck to look for the lamas who should be carrying the Buddha up the path by now, when a young Tibetan boy nearby remarked, "Look up the hill." Knowing that there would be too many worshippers on the mountain paths, the lamas had carried the Buddha to the hilltop the night before.

Now, more than a hundred lamas had formed one long line across the hilltop and were slowly letting the huge, silk-woven picture of the Buddha unfold down the hillside. A large number of other lamas were burning incense and chanting sutras as they bowed their welcome to the Buddha. Meanwhile, four monks mounted a huge boulder and, facing the east, started to blow on their horns. By now, the entire portrait of the Buddha had unfolded before the crowd, so huge in size it could cover a six- or seven-storey building. At that moment, a golden shaft of sunlight lit up his kind and holy features. Tens of thousands of worshippers at once prostrated themselves before it, their chanting of prayers rising and falling like the roaring waves of a tumultuous sea.

At noon, the silver horns blew again and several hundred ecclesiastics, clad in a purplish red kasaya, rolled up the huge portrait and in two lines, one on either side, carried it along the undulating path toward Drepung Monastery. From afar, the scene was like a white dragon swimming along, with worshippers on either side of the path pressing towards it, throwing *tsamba* at it or offering *hatas* (white silk scarves) to it. The worshippers touched the Buddha's portrait with their foreheads or simply joined the carriers, all in the hope that their acts of devotion would win them a better round in their next life.

CELEBRATING AT NORBU LINKA

At this moment, in Norbu Linka, formerly the Dalai Lama's summer resort and now a 36-hectare park, the numerous tents put up to celebrate the Shoton Festival had virtually filled the entire grounds. Tibetan opera performers, wearing the traditional masks and colourful costumes, were singing and dancing to the rapid beating of the drums. For this year's festival, the programs performed, among others, were *Princess Wencheng* and *Prince Norsang*.

A Tibetan sitting cross-legged in the front row, his cheeks now flushed from drinking barley wine, said, "I enjoy the Shoton Festival even more than our Tibetan New Year. Now we can celebrate it here in Norbu Linka, an impressive, tranquil park which in the old days was out of bounds for us ordinary Tibetans."

The grounds of Norbu Linka were filled with tents. It was hard to find a family in Lhasa who had not had a tent set up here to celebrate the Shoton Festival.

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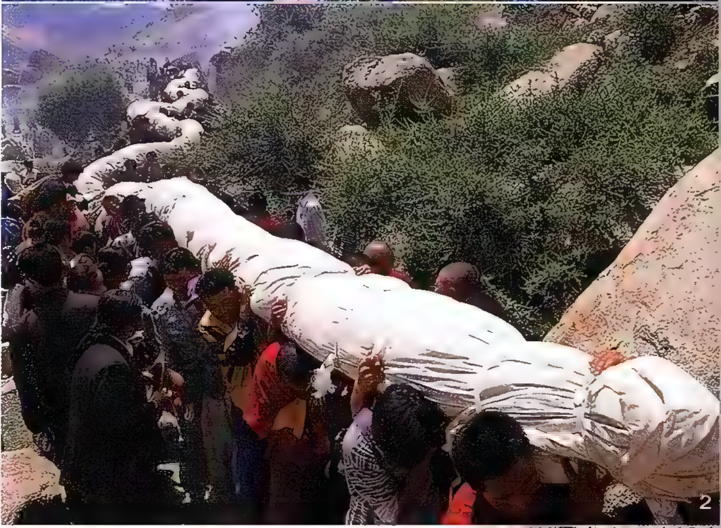
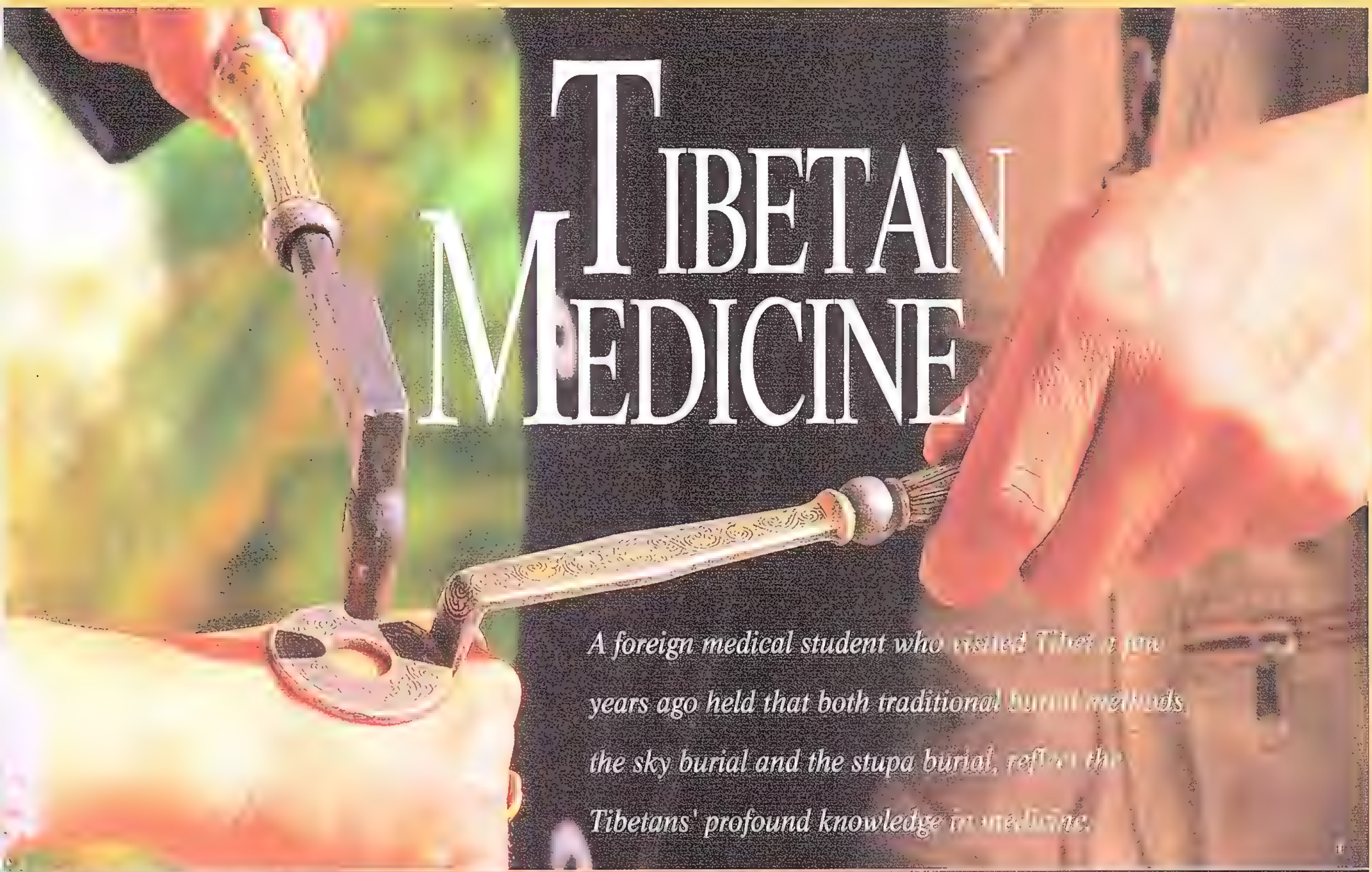

2

3

1. Diversions at the Shoton Festival in Norbu Linka
2. A hundred monks carry the rolled-up woven portrait of the Buddha along a mountain path.
3. Tibetan worshippers turn their prayer wheels near Drepung Monastery on the Shoton Festival day.
4. Tibetan Opera being performed in Norbu Linka during Shoton Festival

TIBETAN MEDICINE

A foreign medical student who visited Tibet a few years ago held that both traditional burial methods, the sky burial and the stupa burial, reflect the Tibetans' profound knowledge in medicine.



1

2

In the library of the Medical School of Tibetan Medicine, located on Dangre Road in Lhasa, there are not only books on Tibetan medicine and pharmacology, but also on Tibetan astrology, the complete scriptures of Tibetan Buddhism, and 81 tangkas of traditional Tibetan medicine. One tangka which attracts particular attention is an illustrated anatomy of the growing embryo showing various stages of development from the so-called fish period (marine vertebrates) to the turtle period (reptiles) and to the hog period (mammals). According to Gyamco, a teacher at the school, "The conclusion that the embryo received all its nutrition via the umbilical cord was reached in Tibetan medicine as far back as in the 8th century, more than 800 years earlier than Italian experts."

Gyamco then asked if I had witnessed the sky burial in Tibet. When I answered "not yet", he went on to tell me that many years ago, a foreign medical student watched the whole process of a sky burial, the traditional Tibetan burial custom, on the platform behind the Sera Monastery. He was absolutely amazed by the burial master's skill in the essential procedure of dismembering the human body.

The student was even more astounded at the process of burying a deceased Living Buddha in a stupa. The body is first washed with a medicinal liquid mixed with aromatic material, then smeared with pure, white salt to draw out the blood and water. This was repeated several times until the body was totally dehydrated. A craftsman then uses a special clay on the deceased's face to make the mould for the Living Buddha statue to be enshrined in a certain monastery.

"Although the two methods of burial are different, they are both imbued with the basic tenets of Tibetan medicine," Gyamco said, adding, "and in both cases, it is the ecclesiastics who perform the entire rituals, an uncommon situation elsewhere. Actually, Tibetan medicine has been passed down from generation to generation through Buddhist teachings."

BUDDHISM INCORPORATES TIBETAN MEDICINE

More than 2,000 years ago, the local people on the Tibetan Plateau were already using animal parts, plants and minerals to cure diseases and pains. In the 7th century, Princess Wencheng and later Princess Jincheng, both from the China's Tang Dynasty, brought to Tibet large numbers of medical and pharmaceutical books and personnel. Through the combination of Han and indigenous medicine, there emerged the theoretical foundation for Tibetan medicine.

"However," Gyamco said, "at that time, conditions were such that many books on Tibetan medicine were able to be preserved only as a part of Buddhist scriptures. Meanwhile, even those scriptures which supposedly dealt wholly with religious teachings sometimes include contents dealing with medicine."

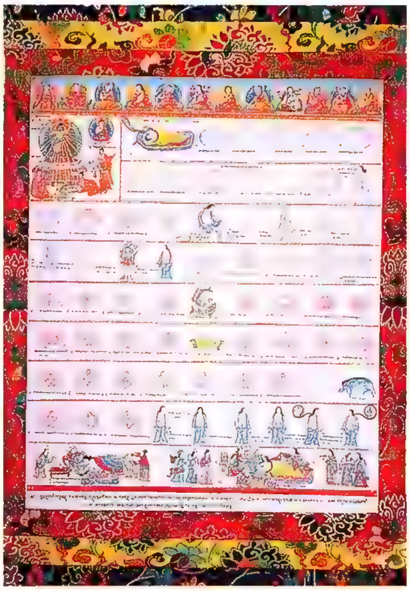
Historically, it was the Fifth Dalai Lama who gave great momentum to the promotion of Tibetan medicine. In his role as the religious leader of Tibet, he established several medical schools, first in Drepung Monastery, then in the Potala Palace and also in the Tashilumpo Monastery.

TIBETAN PHARMACEUTICALS GAIN RECOGNITION

"Our medical school has established a specialists' clinic as well as a Tibetan pharmaceuticals plant," Gyamco said proudly. "With our research staff, the plant has produced quite a number of very effective drugs, including Pearl 70, Renqen Chamjor, new drugs treating Hepatitis B and diabetes, and various tonics and health drugs."

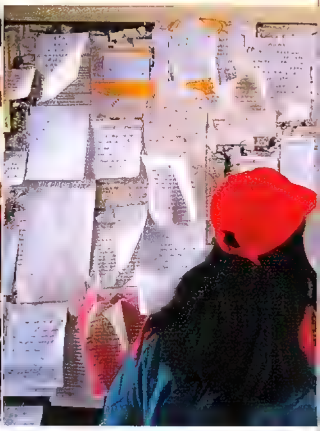
Nowadays it is common to see tourists also buying some of these Tibetan medicines to take home as gifts to friends and relatives.

Translated by
Zhang Qingnian



1. Receiving a treatment
2. Local Tibetan medicine ingredients
3. Processing herbs in a Tibetan pharmaceutical plant
4. Tangka showing the growth of the embryo

EATING, LIVING AND MOVING AROUND IN LHASA



As night falls, Lhasa's Youth Street, lit up by the store lights and street lamps, stimulates the appetite with a mixture of aromas. Walking down the street, I was amazed by the choices and styles of food available — from Xinjiang lamb shish kebab and Ningxia sheep entrails to the super-hot hotpots of Sichuan, glutinous rice flour balls from Ningbo and noodles which attract tourists not so much for their taste, but more for the way they are made and cooked.

I came to two noodle restaurants sitting side by side. One sold Stretched Noodles, a famous dish from Lanzhou, capital of Northwest China's Gansu Province. The cook stood at the board, held up a big hunk of dough with both hands, and threw it hard on the chopping board several times. He then manipulated the dough with his hands so swiftly that I could hardly follow his movements. Before I knew it, the dough had turned into very thin noodles falling loosely down on the board. Tourists stood there transfixed as if they were watching a magician's show. And in the neighbouring restaurant, the cook was performing an equally astonishing feat. He stood at the stove on which rested a big wok, rolled up his sleeves, and placed the hunk of dough on a piece of white cloth on his head. Then he grasped the knife and proceeded to slice the dough into thin strips as fast as could be, the strips falling straight into the pot steaming with boiling soup. Again, he had attracted a big, admiring crowd.

While every one of the snacks offered on Youth Street may taste delicious, tourists to Lhasa, especially those from the West, naturally want to try genuine Tibetan food. Right across the street from Hotel Tibet is the attractively named Snowman's Restaurant, the first Tibetan restaurant to open to overseas visitors. The owner Qoinda was a friendly Tibetan who had once been a cook for the hotel. Urged by his friends, he opened the restaurant a few years ago. "All the raw ingredients are fresh. We serve mainly beef and mutton dishes, which most Westerners like," Qoinda said. With a broad smile, he added, "Business is pretty good. Our main customers are tourist groups from overseas." The entire decor in the restaurant is typically Tibetan in style. I must say his mutton chops are absolutely delicious, both tender and tasty. And the drinks he made himself with fresh milk, such as honey milk, pineapple milk, strawberry milk and even banana milk, all have an extremely unique flavour.

Banak Shol Hotel was the first Tibetan-style hotel in Lhasa to open to overseas visitors. It has three storeys, with all the rooms on each floor opening onto a long corridor with windows providing plenty of sunshine. Visitors often sit, chat or read here during the day. It is also a centre for visitors returning from their tour trips to other parts of Tibet to gather and swap impressions. As well, people can use the bulletin board to find others going to remote places or to

find transportation somewhere. This practice was apparently passed down from the days of the caravans.

The toilets in Banak Shol Hotel are the squat style found elsewhere in Tibet and other parts of China. Uniquely, there is a rope hanging down from the beam overhead with a loop at the end, looking somewhat like a noose, for you to hold on to when you get up. Often, new arrivals in Tibet, unaccustomed to the high altitude, have difficulty arising. Visitors who find themselves easily tired from the high altitude may take advantage of the hotel's free laundry service. Thanks to the plentiful sunshine in Lhasa and the solar energy facilities, there is 24-hour hot water.

Lhasa does not have any public buses. The chief means of transport are minibuses at fares of 2 yuan regardless of distance; taxis, 10 yuan within the city and subject to bargaining going outside of town; and the most convenient, three-wheeled pedicabs which abound in Lhasa, charging 3 to 5 yuan for a trip. Many hotels and travel services rent bicycles for 2 yuan an hour. Most travel agencies also provide long-distance rental cars at the rate of 2.5 to 6 yuan per kilometre, depending on the type of car. It is 100 kilometres from Lhasa to Gongga Airport. Since all flights in and out of Lhasa are in the morning and there are no airport buses going to the airport before noon, passengers leaving Lhasa have to either go by taxi in the morning or stay overnight at the airport the day before their flight.

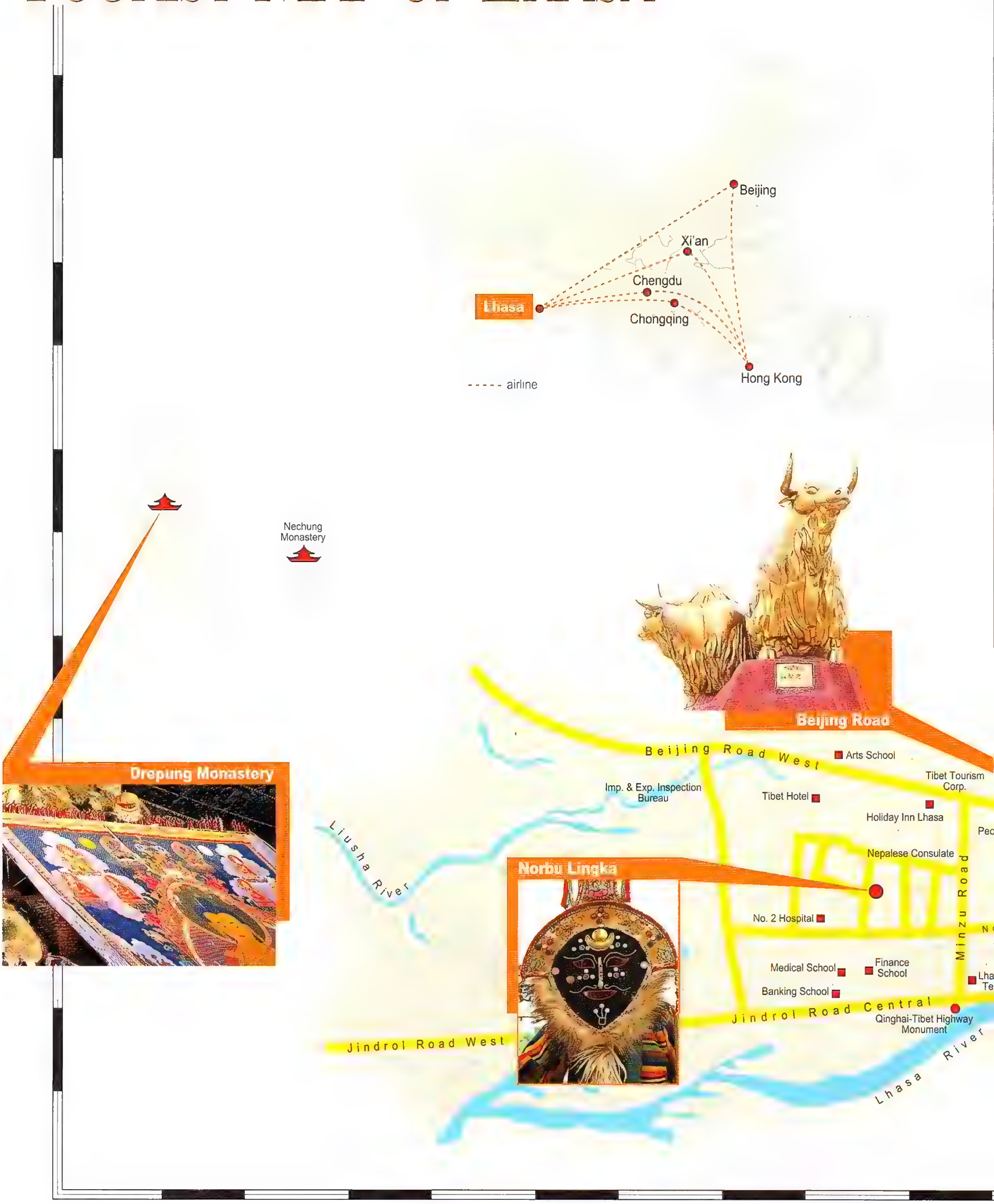
Getting Your Visa

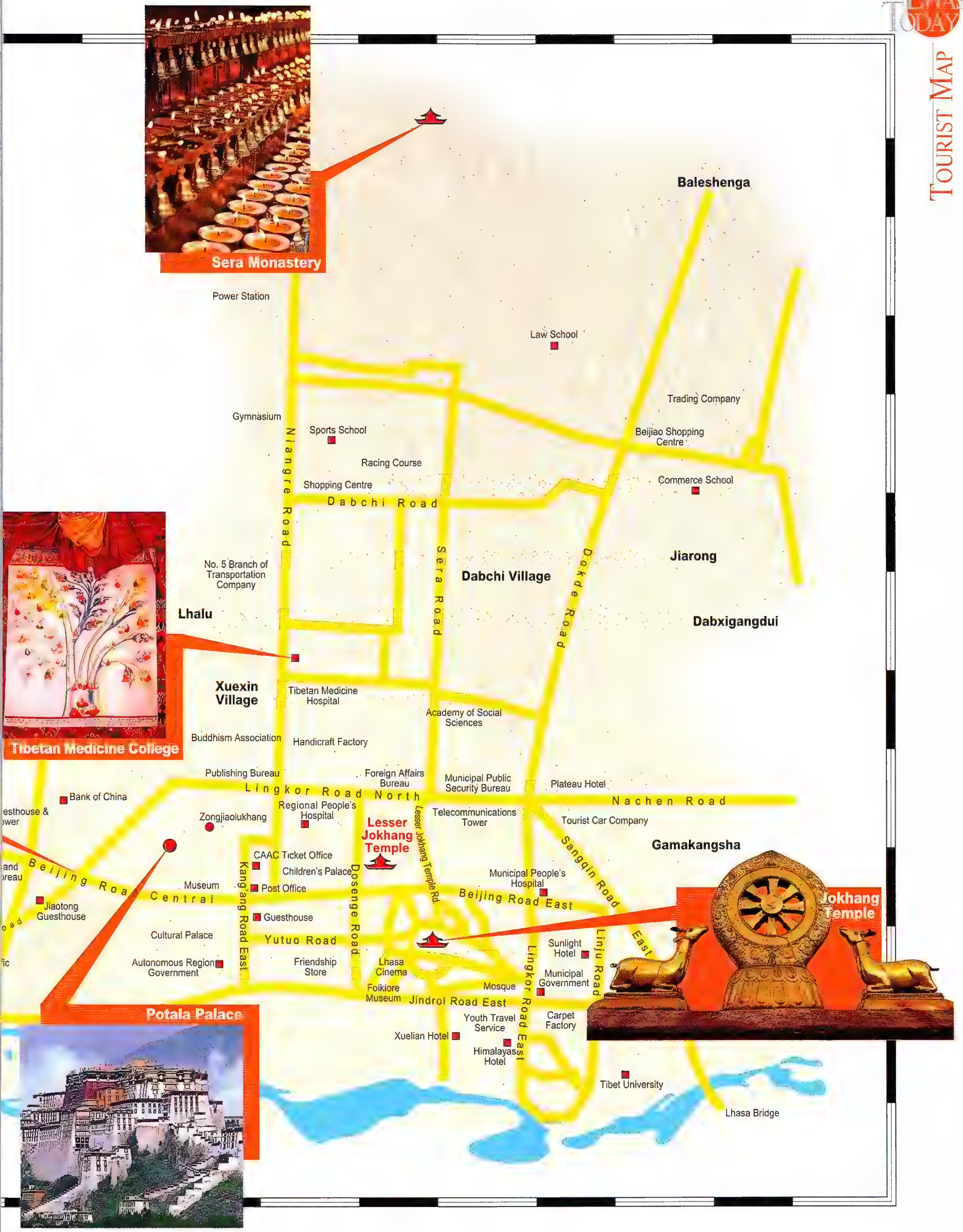
Overseas visitors already in China should apply for a confirmation letter for travel in Tibet from the Tourism Administration of the Tibet Autonomous Region through Tibetan travel agencies in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu or Xian. Hong Kong residents should get such permission through the Tibetan travel agency in Hong Kong.

Visitors overseas should apply for this confirmation letter through Tibetan travel agencies in Hong Kong or in Japan, Nepal and the United States prior to their application for a visa to China. Applicants must provide each visitor's name and passport number. The Tourism Administration of the Tibet Autonomous Region will then notify the appropriate consulate or embassy to issue the visa to the applicant or tour group.

1. A Tibetan meal — a must for any tourist
2. Weaving rugs at the Lhasa Carpet Factory using traditional Tibetan techniques
3. Sticking a notice on the bulletin board to find a rental car and perhaps even some fellow travellers
4. The three-wheeled pedicab conveniently stops at the wave of a hand and charges three to five yuan per trip.
5. Many hotels and hostels have bicycles for rent at two yuan per hour.
6. A room in a typical Tibetan-style hotel
7. Visitors are often swarmed by Tibetan girls peddling jewellery on the streets of Lhasa.
8. A tangka with the Potala Palace as its theme is a choice souvenir of tourists.
9. Two uniquely Tibetan souvenirs — the tangka and the yak head

TOURIST MAP OF LHASA


Beijing
Xi'an
Chengdu
Lhasa
Chongqing
Hong Kong
- - - - - airline
Nechung Monastery
Beijing Road
Beijing Road West
Arts School
Tibet Tourism Corp.
Imp. & Exp. Inspection Bureau
Tibet Hotel
Holiday Inn Lhasa
Pec
Drepung Monastery
Liusha River
Nepalese Consulate
Norbu Lingka
No. 2 Hospital
Minzu Road
N
Medical School
Finance School
Lha
Te
Banking School
Jindrol Road Central
Qinghai-Tibet Highway Monument
Jindrol Road West
Lhasa River


Sera Monastery
Power Station
Baleshenga
Law School
Trading Company
Beijiao Shopping Centre
Commerce School
Gymnasium
Sports School
Racing Course
Shopping Centre
Niangre Road
Dabchi Road
Sera Road
Dokde Road
Dabchi Village
Jiarong
Dabxigangdui
No. 5 Branch of Transportation Company
Lhalu
Tibetan Medicine College
Xuexin Village
Tibetan Medicine Hospital
Academy of Social Sciences
Buddhism Association
Handicraft Factory
Publishing Bureau
Foreign Affairs Bureau
Municipal Public Security Bureau
Plateau Hotel
Lingkor Road North
Nachen Road
Bank of China
esthouse &
ower
Zongjiaolukhang
Regional People's Hospital
Lesser Jokhang Temple
Lesser Jokhang Temple Rd.
Telecommunications Tower
Tourist Car Company
Gamakangsha
CAAC Ticket Office
Children's Palace
and
reau
Beijing Road Central
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Post Office
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oad
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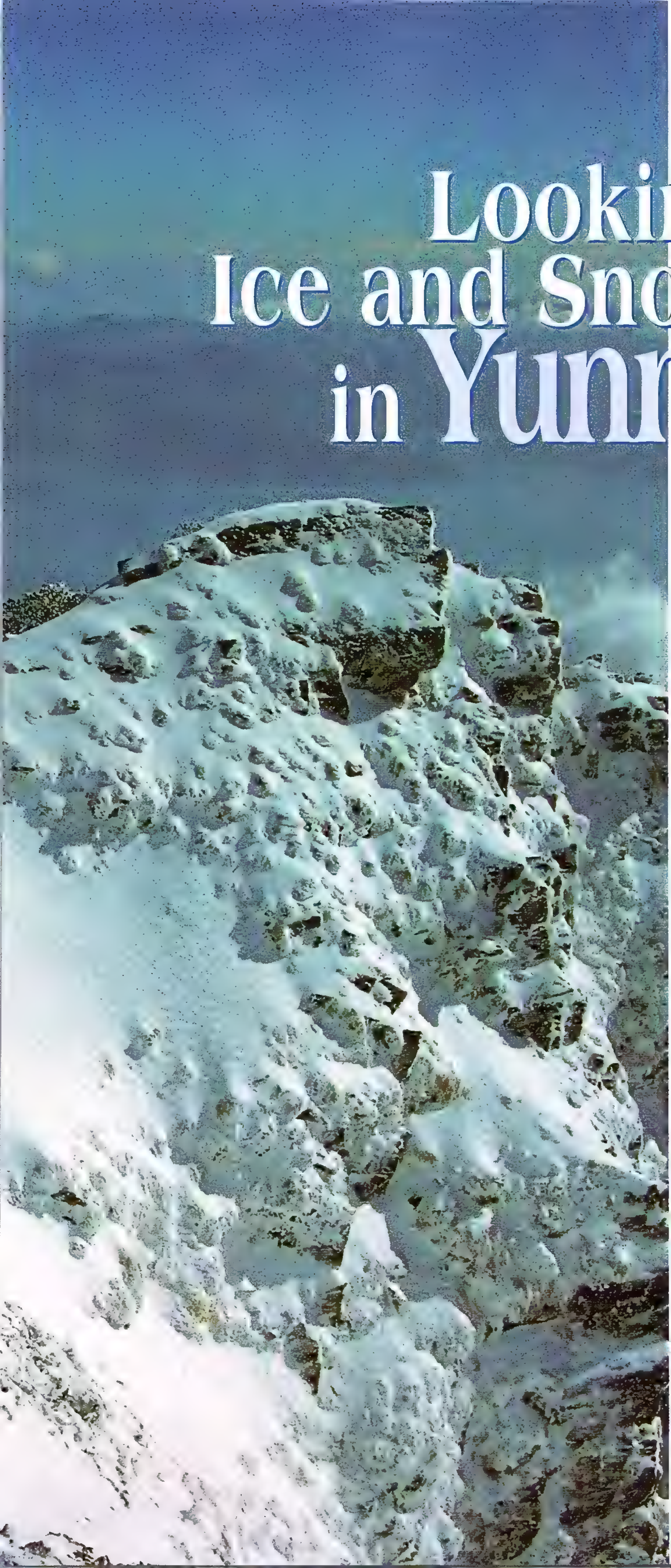
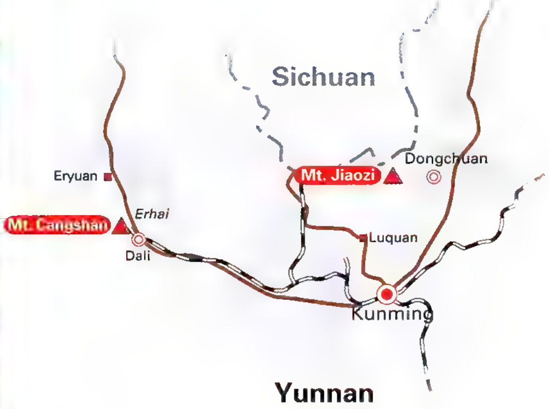
Friendship Store
Lhasa Cinema
Municipal Government
Folklore Museum
Mosque
Lingkor Road East
Jindrol Road East
Potala Palace
Youth Travel Service
Carpet Factory
Xuelian Hotel
Himalayas Hotel
Tibet University
Lhasa Bridge

Looking for Ice and Snow in Yunnan



The following two stories both mention the marvellous world of snow and ice nestled in Yunnan Province. It may be a surprise to many of our readers that just a few hours' drive from Kunming, the capital of the province that is known as the Spring City because of its year-round warm weather, you can find lovely snow scenes and indulge yourself in a silvery world.


Sichuan
Eryuan
Mt. Jiaozi
Dongchuan
Mt. Cangshan
Erhai
Dali
Luquan
Kunming
Yunnan

Map Showing the Location of Mt. Cangshan & Mt. Jiaozi

The Bewitching Snow-covered Jiaozi Mountain

Photos & article by Yi Jiabao

In Luquan County, the Jiaozi Snow Mountain towers, unknown to most travellers, but only 180 kilometres from Kunming. During the Chinese New Year festival last year, we arrived at Sifangjing, the foot of the mountain 3,200 metres high, and headed for the base camp 4.5 kilometres away. Within half an hour, mountain sickness hit me; I felt weak and sweated incessantly.

After passing a broad expanse of flourishing camellias and azaleas, I was greeted by a frigid gust on a winding mountain path — my first taste of the power of the chill and the "alpine climate". At the snow-line at 3,700 metres, I caught sight of a tranquil, glistening world of snow and ice decorated with snow-laden azaleas. The beauty did not, however, distract our attention from the icy path for long since the route was so slippery that we had to walk as carefully as toddlers who had just learned to walk.

The base camp nestled in a dense pine forest and azalea shrubs was on the northern slope of Jiaozi Mountain at 3,750 metres. The cottages

standing amidst the snowy world were a warm invitation to us shivering mountaineers.

Early the next morning, we continued our trek, bringing our own food and water. Before long, we reached the Huaxi (Flower Stream) — a clear gurgling stream with azaleas lining both banks. From here to Tianchi Lake we had to climb up the "One-line Sky" — a narrow path with an increasing gradient flanked by precipices on both sides, showing only a narrow crevice of blue sky. By the time we reached "The Point of Despair", where the snow was about one foot deep, some members decided to give up and head back to the camp, while others declared that the only thing they wanted to do was go home.

The pines here, laden with snow, looked particularly gorgeous. After a break, we started off towards Tianchi Lake. The land around the lake was relatively flatter and the vegetation changed: the azalea bushes were much shorter, and snow tea-leaves were discovered among them. We arrived at the lake at noon and ate heartily to replenish our energy.

Tianchi Lake boasted marvellous scenery all round. To its left on a slope was an expanse of "Dead Forest" where withered tree trunks stood like brave soldiers who had died a heroic death on the battlefield. Later, we played games on the frozen lake but became exhausted after only 10 minutes, which reminded us we were 4,070 metres high!

After having a great time, we started our descent, passing Mubanhai, Immortal Field, Elf Pond and finally Moon Rock. This was the most adventurous section of the whole journey: we had to force ourselves through a slippery cleft between two precipices, using chains fixed into the rock to assist climbers. Yet we were rewarded as we passed the "gap" — a view of a spectacular ice fall, 30 metres high and 10 metres wide, glittering under the blue sky.

Previous page: On the ridge of Cangshan Mountains, 4,000 metres above sea level (by Kong Yunfeng)

1. **Tianchi Lake in the early winter**
2. **Bizarre "sculptures" on Jiaozi Mountain — pine trees laden in snow**
3. **The mountain base camp at an altitude of 3,750 metres**
4. **"Sliding" on the snow (by Tong Lin)**
5. **The spectacular ice fall on Jiaozi Mountain**

Tips for the Traveller

Scenic spots: Jiaozi Mountain, 4,221 metres above sea level, gets its name from its shape, which is similar to a *jiaozi* (sedan chair). Scenic spots include the base camp, Flower Stream, One-line Sky, Tianchi Lake, Dead Forest, Mubanhai, Immortal Field, Elf Pond, Moon Rock as well as the ice fall. The region is affected by a vertical alpine climate, hence vertical vegetation variations are noticeable. From late October to late March the summit is covered in snow. The base camp in the valley of Daheiqing is built above the snow-line. Walking from Sifangjing to the base camp takes about two and a half hours.

Recommended itinerary:

Day 1: Travel 180 kilometres from Kunming to Sifangjing at the foot of Jiaozi Mountain (6 hours). Then walk or go on horseback up to the mountain base camp and lodge there.

Day 2: Tour the scenic spots on the mountain, bringing along self-prepared lunch. Lodge in the camp.

Day 3: Leave the mountain after breakfast and return to Kunming by coach.

It is advised to join the local tour which costs 350 yuan (including lodging, transportation, tickets and meals on the journey). Horse rental and meals on the mountain are excluded. (Contact Tel: 871-3546639)

Climbing the Snow-capped Cangshan Mountain in Summer

Photos and article by Kong Yunfeng

The Cangshan Mountain, with a snow line at 3,800 metres altitude, offers the chance to see snow even in summer. Along with some friends, all mountaineering-lovers, I went there in early summer.

That sunny day at noon, without a hitch, we reached Zhonghe Peak. At an elevation of 4,092 metres, it is the third highest peak of the Cangshan Mountain, and is the location of the Cangshan Television Broadcasting Station. We took photos to commemorate this successful ascent; behind us, the solemn and spectacular Malong Peak, summit of Cangshan Mountain, cast a huge, dragon-like shadow on the icy ground. Then, following a clear path, we climbed up Yuju Peak from a southern pass.

Malong and Yuju peaks are joined by an 800-metre-long section of gently-sloped ridge. The ridge teems with jagged rocks while the slopes are dominated by azalea bushes.

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Beyond the azaleas is a boundless expanse of white snow.

The ridge underneath Malong Peak is extremely sharp and precipitous, resembling a saw with irregular teeth. The north face is a steep gradient of more than 60 degrees extending into a gloomy ravine 800 metres deep. The south face is an unfathomable abyss. The team members far in front looked like ants crawling on a huge monster.

The path finally ended and my heart was beating with joy and pride. People who have never ascended Malong Peak cannot possibly capture the whole picture of Cangshan: the mountain is not only verdant, elegant and serene, but also magnificent, solemn, tough and chilly.

The saddle area was covered with knee-deep snow. The fact that we were not wearing boots with crampons and that the path was just several metres wide increased the risks for us amateur mountain climbers. We made our way through by cutting steps with ice-axes.

Then we had to scramble up a sheer precipice. Luckily the rocky cliff provided perfect footholds for our ascent. Nevertheless, before each move forward, we made sure that the other three limbs were secure before we moved the fourth one. I cheered heartily for myself after I successfully conquered this difficult section.

Finally at 3:10 p.m., we reached the top of Malong Peak, 4,122 metres above sea level, and found the metal monument erected by the Dali Prefecture Science and Technology Committee in 1998 and the 1990 iron sign of the Kunming Mountain Climbing and Tourism Association.

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1. Having fun on the ice-covered terrace 3,950 metres above sea level
2. Let's have a photo before setting off!
3. Reaching the summit of Malong Peak (by Huang Huaxing)
4. Amidst the snow-laden azalea bushes
5. The magnificent Malong Peak

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Tips for the Traveller

Transport: Flights departs from Kunming for Dali at 08:30 every day except Thursday, at 12:40 on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday and at 09:20 on Thursday and Friday. The journey lasts about 35 minutes and the ticket costs 340 yuan. There is also a sleeper coach which takes eight hours.

Touring: The snow-line of Cangshan Mountain is 3,500 metres above sea level in winter. Climbing Malong Peak in winter is not recommended for ordinary tourists. Experienced mountaineers can ascend the 4,092-metre Zhonghe Peak in winter and early spring to admire the white snow world. No restaurants and hotels exist on the mountain.

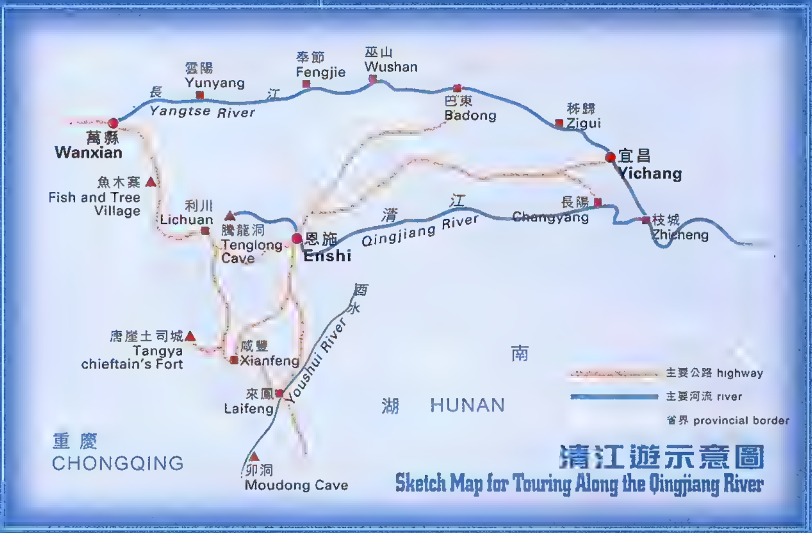
Recommended one-day tour for tourists: Get a cable car from Dali to Zhonghe Temple. Walk southwards along Yudai Road towards Xiaguan and Qingbi Stream, enjoying the scenery of Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake on the way. This is a five-hour trip, so remember to bring along your own food. A path leads eastwards from Qingbi Stream to Xiaguan-Dali Highway where Dali- or Xiaguan-bound coaches pass.

TRAVELLING ALONG THE

QINGJIANG RIVER

Photos and article by Shan Xiaogang

The Qingjiang River runs almost parallel with the Yangtse River along a stretch from Wanxian in Sichuan Province to Yichang in Hubei Province, with only a few dozen kilometres distance between them. I decided to follow the Qingjiang, a route seldom taken by tourists, intentionally bypassing the most famous and colourful section of the Yangtse — the Three Gorges. The Qingjiang's course is interestingly marked by local customs, picturesque peaks, mysterious caves and various kinds of rafting activities.


雲陽
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Badong
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Zigui
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Wanxian
宜昌
Yichang
魚木寨
Fish and Tree Village
利川
Lichuan
騰龍洞
Tenglong Cave
恩施
Enshi
清
江
Qingjiang River
長陽
Changyang
枝城
Zhicheng
酉
水
Youshui River
唐崖土司城
Tangya chieftain's Fort
咸豐
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湖
HUNAN
重慶
CHONGQING
卯洞
Moudong Cave
主要公路 highway
主要河流 river
省界 provincial border

清江遊示意圖
Sketch Map for Touring Along the Qingjiang River

魚木寨
魚木寨

The Fish and Tree Village

Fifty kilometres from Wanxian along the State Highway 318, I turned off to visit Yumuzhai (Fish and Tree Village), my first destination in Lichuan County, Hubei Province. From the highway, I travelled on foot over the Qiyue Mountain, then I turned onto a mountain path, crossed the Tongluo Pass and Daxingchang, and finally came to the most famous village of the Tujia people — the Fish and Tree Village built on the top of the mountain.

Sedan chairs carrying brides were laboriously pulled and pushed up to the village on this perilous cliff path.

One story about the name says that during the mid-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when villagers refused to pay taxes, government troops attacked the village but failed to take it after two months. Believing the village must be short of grain, the troops called for surrender. Their cries were answered by a huge live fish and a pair of straw sandals tossed out to indicate ample grain and fodder. The Qing army commander remarked dejectedly before pulling his troops out: "Taking this village is like trying to catch fish by climbing a tree!"

A Perilous Ride for Brides

The Fish and Tree Village is obviously strategically defended. It has village walls and four gates as well as sentry posts built a long time ago. I went to the Sanyang Pass, the main passageway in the northeast of the village. Inside this pass stand the Taiping Cliffs, rising dozens of metres up from the ground and equipped with over 30 levels of stone footholds and handles chiselled out of the rock. Local villagers claimed that their ancestors relied on this pass to climb up into the village. More surprisingly, even coffins and sedan chairs carrying brides securely tied in, were laboriously pulled and pushed up to the village on this perilous cliff path.

Home of the Tujia People

In the village, I walked along a stone path that zigzagged through pine groves and patches of farmland. Rice paddies carpeted the sunny side of the mountain slope.

The village has more than 150 families, most of them belonging to the Tujia ethnic minority. Their houses, built with adobe, stones and tiles, are furnished in typical Tujia style. Pigs and cows are kept on the ground floor; preserved meats hang from the kitchen beam; huge vats are filled with either rice, corn or liquor. The villagers make almost everything from mountain stones — vats, basins, troughs, tables and stools.

Before the Qing Dynasty, the villagers used to live in caves. At the foot of a mountain cliff, I saw several spacious and dry caves that received sunshine and were well ventilated. The former headman's cave has two storeys. With stone doors and windows to shield the occupants from wind and rain, these cave dwellings ensure coolness in summer and warmth in winter.

Among the other caves, the most mysterious is the money cave, a natural cave with precipitous cliffs both above and below its entrance. The money cave had to be a most discreet place, for the penalty for coining money without governmental permission was death. It had a watchtower built against the cliffs and was guarded by men armed with swords.

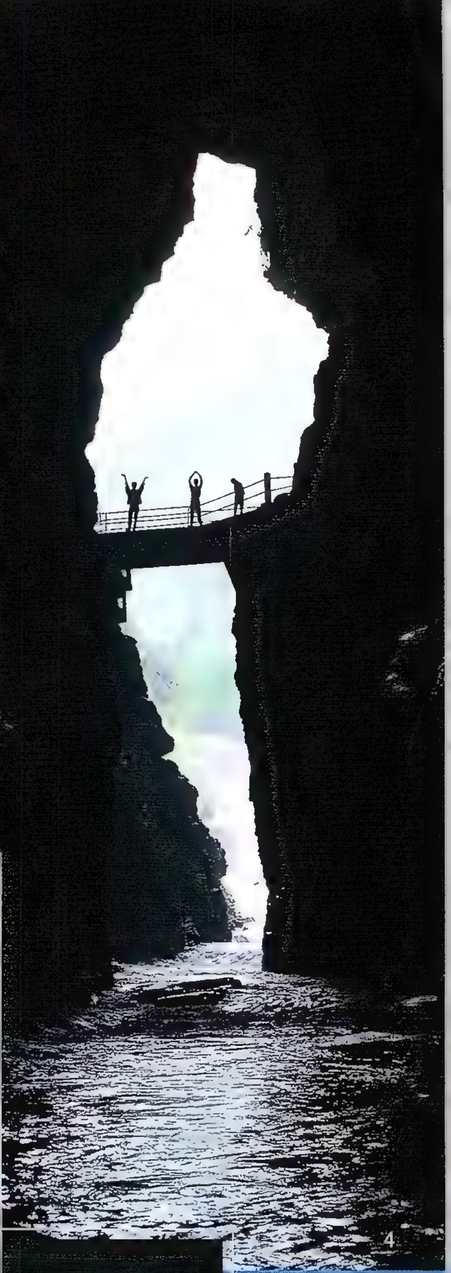
A Colossal Cave for 800,000 People

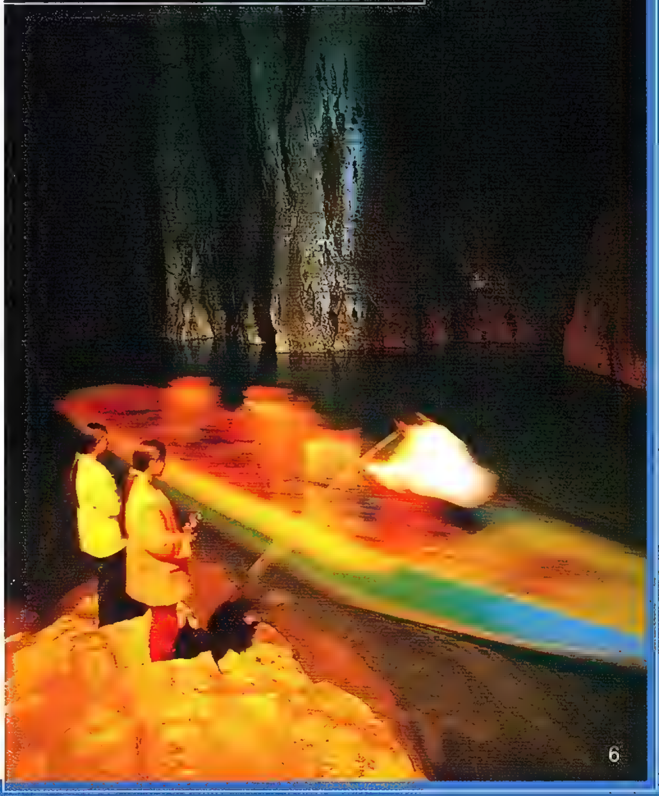
Back to State Highway 318, I travelled 80 kilometres by bus to the city of Lichuan.

This is one of the major Chinese regions known for its karst caves. From Liangwu Town I sailed downstream to Shuilian (Water Lily) Cave. There, I boarded a small boat to go on the underground river. Inside the spacious cave, it was so quiet that the sounds of the bamboo pole splashing into the river, the iron boat hitting the cave wall and water dropping from the ceiling all echoed into a beautiful concerto.

Previous page: 1,2: Vivid and life-like carvings on an ancient tomb • 3. The gate to the cemetery • 4. The southern gate of the Fish and Tree Village is the only exit leading to flatland.

1. **A house with rammed earth walls**
2. **The Clan Hall of the Xiang, the best preserved ancient building in the Fish and Tree Village**
3. **The rushing currents of Qingjiang River at the entrance of the Tenglong Cave**
4. **The entrance of Luoshui (Dropping Water) Cave**
5. **A thrilling climb on the Sanyang Pass cliff**
6. **Sailing through the dark Catfish Cave**

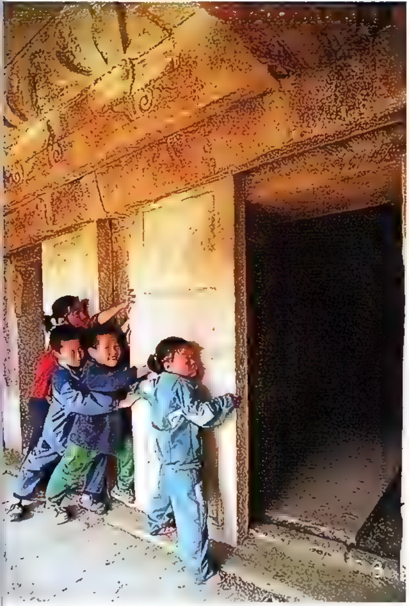




Northeast of Lichuan is a famous cave called Tenglong (Flying Dragon). Here the Qingjiang River suddenly cascades over 20 metres to form a roaring waterfall. As we made our way on the wet stone path to the cave dock, I found the entrance was only a tiny slit. The river water flows into the cave and creates a lake more than 70 metres deep; the water's large quantity of catfish gave the cave the nickname, Catfish Cave. A decade ago, a Belgian exploration team attempted to raft in the Catfish Cave. They gave up half way after being chased by a metre-long giant catfish with a wide open mouth. Several people were fishing without bait because the fish here are almost blind.

A Belgian exploration team rafting in the Catfish Cave was chased by a metre-long giant catfish with a wide open mouth.

To the left is a colossal dry cave with a wide open gate and a ceiling 235 metres high. With a total floor space of 1.56 million square metres, the cave could allow 16 trucks to drive in abreast. If the 800,000 people of Lichuan gathered here, they would each have two square metres of space.



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The Chieftain's Fort

I went south from Lichuan toward Xianfeng where there was an ancient town called the Tangya Chieftain's Fort. Its chief was once a major tribal chieftain in west Hubei.

I came to the ruins of the fort by the Tangya River at the foot of the Xuanwu Hill. From a vantage point, I found the layout of the streets was still visible among the broken walls and dilapidated house foundations. Walking in the fort, I saw many traces of the fortress' past glory and size — stone staircases, foundations of pillars, walls and horse troughs. Still existing is the Horse King

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Temple with stone figures and horses, which was erected in memory of the Tujia King Qin Ding's expedition against bandits. Today, the Tujia people here use the broken walls as fences and shelters for their vegetable gardens.

Elevated Tujia Houses

In Xujiatuo Village on the Duanmingxia Mountain I had a close look at the elevated houses of the Tujia people. One house in particular in this well-laid out village, where everyone is surnamed Liu, is believed to be the best representative of the Tujia buildings in western Hubei.

It turned out to be a large house with a hall and two wing rooms, formally constructed with seven pillars and nine beams, obviously requiring a considerable sum to build it. The house is located right in the centre of the village, with huge trees behind it.

The Tujia houses, standing highly elevated above the ground, allow air to pass underneath, and at the same time avoid troubles from poisonous snakes and wild animals. They all have two storeys, with the top floor serving as bedrooms and the lower level as a warehouse, grinding mill, pigsty or cow shed.

Rafting Through the Mountain 'Heart'

My original plan was to return to Enshi directly from Xianfeng, but when I learned of an exciting rafting event in the Maodong Cave, I changed my itinerary.

Maodong Cave is on the Youshui River in Laifeng County where the water was as pure as it could be. The fascinating part of rafting in the cave was that it meant going through the "heart" of the mountain. The boat sailed towards the valley and the view became increasingly magnificent. This small section of the river was marked by mysterious caves, abrupt cliffs and rugged peaks towering over dark green waters.

Suddenly as if drawn by a magic force, the calm waters of the Youshui River roared into the hollow mountain, throwing up huge white waves. After sailing through the first rapid, the second rapid quickly came and, this time, we lost control and fell into the water. When we surfaced, we found one girl missing; we all shivered with cold and worried

1. **The tomb of a Ming-dynasty chiefman**
2. **The stone horse and soldier guarding the tomb**
3. **The tomb is built with a stone sliding door.**
4. **Xu Jiatuo, a village of the Tujia people**
5. **The wooden house, running water and stone vessel of a Tujia family at Huangcheng**

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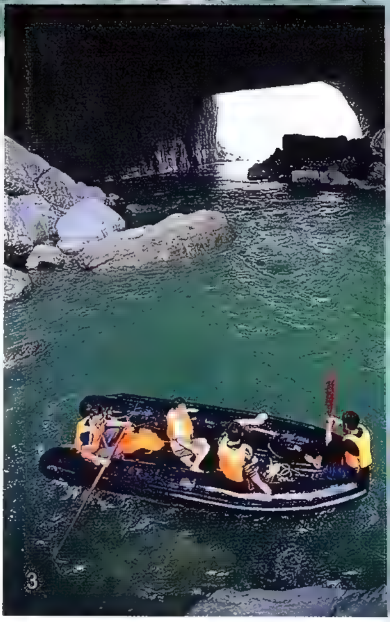
until the girl calmly emerged from the cabin of the boat.

We sailed right through this huge tunnel cave out the mountain where the Youshui River returned to its clear, calm self.

The Fun of Getting Wet

"Rafting on the Qingjiang and experiencing the scare!" The advertisement of the Rafting Company made another rafting trip irresistible. Thus, back in Enshi, I went rafting again. Once on the rubber dinghy, the boatman warned us: "Nine out of 10 of you will be thrown into the water. Those who don't get wet can have a free ride." We began the journey at the Qingjiang River Bridge, passed the Longshou Hill, and entered a gorge that narrowed to only several metres between sheer cliffs. It was a tranquil world until the river made a turn, and thunderous roars came to our ears, announcing the coming of the Fusantiao (Three Covered Jumps) lying beyond the Zuoguaizi Shoal, one of the most dangerous rapids on the entire 400-kilometre course of the Qingjiang River. At the First Jump the waves tossed the small boat wildly and the passengers turned white with fear. The second and third rapids came in quick succession; a huge wave hit the dinghy and, before we realised it, everything turned dark and we found ourselves in the water.

The waves tossed the small boat wildly and the passengers turned white with fear.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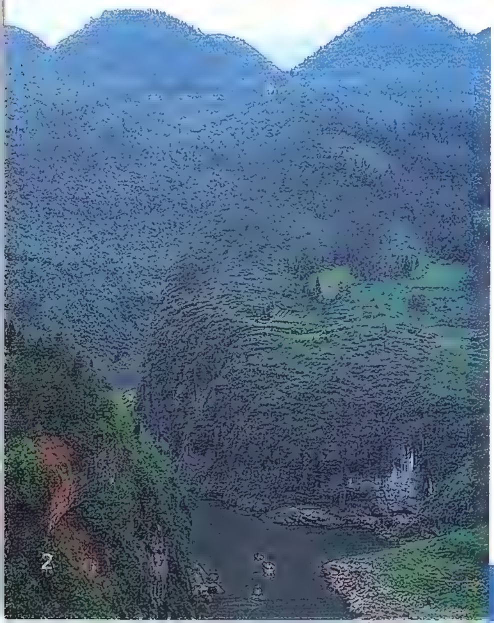
The passengers, all wet, spoke heartily about their feelings of falling into the river and getting wet. Later, sailing on the calm river, we passed many scenic spots, such as the Lianhua (Lotus) Rapids and the Rhinoceros Cave.

Crying, a Custom of the Tujia Weddings

After arriving in Changyang from Enshi, I joined a local tour to the county cultural centre on the Qingjiang riverside where we watched performances by the Tujia people.

At the sound of a flute, young Tujia men and women in typical ethnic costumes, assembled in front of the centre and blew long horns to welcome guests. Inside, one after another,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interesting and humorous songs and dances unfolded in front of the spectators — the Nanqu, songs unique to the Tujia people; the Bashan Dance; the newly created bamboo-pole dance; and the most fascinating cultural demonstration, *The Company of Ten Sisters* and *Wedding Cries*.

It is the tradition of the Tujia that on the eve of a girl's wedding, she invites over nine of her best unmarried girlfriends. They sit and sing throughout the night to express their reluctance to part. On the wedding day the bride's entire family, friends and relatives join in the singing. The more they sing, however, the more sorrowfully they cry, demonstrating the deep love between the bride and her folks.

Translated by F. Huang

1. **Rafting through the Three Covered Jumps**
2. **The meandering Qingjiang River**
3. **Getting ready for more rapids ahead**
4. **Welcome to the Changyang Cultural Centre!**
5. **A Tujia "bride" presents "happy eggs" to tourists.**
6. **A piece of woven handicraft**
7. **Back baskets, a famous local product of Laifeng**

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Tips for the Traveller

Suggested route: You can get to Wanxian from Chongqing by bus, or by ship; if time permits, sail from Wuhan along the Yangtse River through the Three Gorges; then take a long-distance bus to the Fish and Tree Village, where you can also see the karst caves. To see the Tangya Chiefman's Fort, go south to Xianfeng and rent a car for the 30-kilometre drive to the fort, and also visit Xujiatuo Village on the way. From Xianfeng go to Laifeng to experience the fun of rafting (70 yuan for the 20-kilometre waterway). Unique local handicrafts made of brocade are sold in the area.

From Laifeng, you can take a bus to Enshi to enjoy the Qingjiang River rafting (125 yuan for the 38-kilometre route). Then take a day-long bus trip to Changyang, where you can join a tour to see the performances of the Tujia people at the cultural centre.

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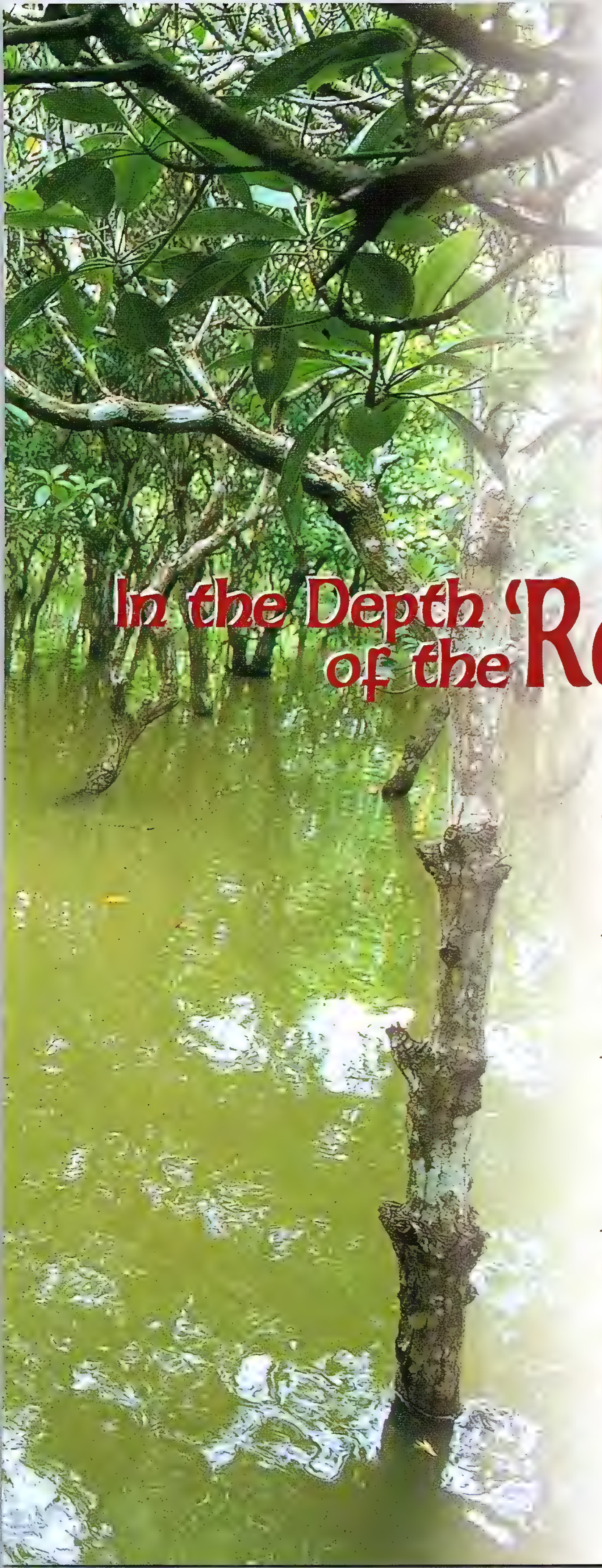
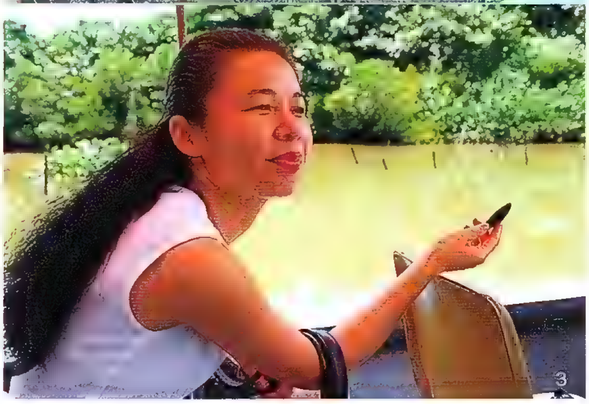


In the Depth of the 'Red Forest'

Photos & article by Huang Yanhong

On July 13, 1605, a catastrophic earthquake occurred at Qiongzhou, the southernmost tip of Hainan Island, and more than 100 square kilometres of land sank perpendicularly into the sea. As a result, many villages disappeared underwater overnight, and in their place appeared a large piece of tidal land exceeding 3,300 hectares. By and by, the tidal land turned into thickets of mangrove trees and acquired the name "Red Forest".



The mangroves are different from ordinary plants in many ways — their leaves are capable of discharging the salt, their roots can breathe, and their seeds sprout into new seedlings on the tree, as mammals give birth to their offspring.

The "Red Forest" is in fact not red. It is simply a large belt of trees in charming green, which belong to the "red tree" family. Roaming through these thickets in a small boat, it was hard to tell whether it was the water surrounding the forest or the forest encircling the water.

A Green Wall of Protection

It would be fairly easy to get lost in this vast forest of mangroves stretching more than 50 kilometres along the coast. Thanks to the development of tourism in recent years, the Red Forest now has become a bustling site, receiving many guests from afar as it earned fame. We entered the forest by boat with Mr. Zhang of the Red Forest Protection Department as our guide. Along the meandering sailing channels, motorboats roared past now and then, with great waves crashing into trees on both sides, then ebbing docilely on the trees' huge, dense branches, losing all their raging force.

Mr. Zhang told us that Hainan Island used to be called "a corridor of typhoons" and the island relied on the mangroves for protection. Over the past few decades, these groves had been destroyed on several occasions. Trees were felled in the 1950s, in the years of the "Great Leap Forward" during massive efforts to increase the output of iron and steel, and again in the 1970s to reclaim wasteland for farmland. Large tracts of the forest were destroyed, reducing it down to only 1,500 hectares. The people soon tasted the bitter fruit of their ignorance — in 1980, a strong typhoon burst the 10-kilometre embankment at 80 different points.

Unique Phenomenon One: Salt-filtering Leaves

Leisurely sightseeing in the forest, we found trees reached 16 metres in some areas while the shorter ones were less than two metres. Some trees exceed 200 years of age while the youngest have just sprouted. Mr. Zhang told us, all together there were more than 20 species of trees, accounting for over 60 percent of the total species of red trees discovered in China. As this area sank below the sea level after the earthquake, sea water and river water rushed in, turning it an estuarine gulf. I dipped my hand in water; it tasted quite

salty. The earliest living things that settled in this swampland were seedlings of the red trees which quickly grew into a large forest on the sea. Conditions for growth are harsh, with the rising and ebbing of the tides and fierce winds. Moreover, the trees also have to be able to live in the salty water — the mangroves are divinely suited to this. Their leaves are capable of discharging the salt, making it possible for them to draw nutrients from sea water.

Unique Phenomenon Two: Breathing Roots

At one point, our boat was stuck in mud when the tide was ebbing away. The stilt-like aerial roots of the trees were exposed above the muddy ground of the forest. Getting down from the boat in my bare feet I found it was extremely difficult to walk. At every step, my feet stuck deeper and deeper in the mud. Moreover, the intertwining roots grew so dense that it was almost impossible to find a foothold among them. Stepping directly on the root was indeed very painful. Deeper into the forest, the roots became more dense; some trailed along the ground and yet others stood erect like bamboo shoots, creating an artistic" natural exhibition of root carvings". The exceptional number of roots fixed into the loose muddy seabed are the trees' way of standing firm before the brutal wind and waves. But Mr. Zhang told us that one of the roots' most important functions is breathing.

Unique Phenomenon Three: Viviparity

As the tide rose the roots quickly disappeared under water and I rushed back to the boat. We tried to go further into the forest but with a wide boat, we could only go a few dozen metres. Here it was quieter and more serene until a tree seedling fell on the water. It simply looked like an olive branch. "Don't look down upon it," Mr. Zhang said. "It represents an outstanding feature of mangroves and explains why the forest displays such strong vitality." As the seeds of the trees mature, they first germinate and sprout into new seedlings before falling. Once on the ground, they will immediately take root and develop into young trees. More surprisingly, these seedlings show a strong will to survive. Even if they float with the tide over a long distance, they can remain alive for several months in the sea. The moment they drop onto a beach, they can produce new roots in several hours, and then quickly produce new leaves.

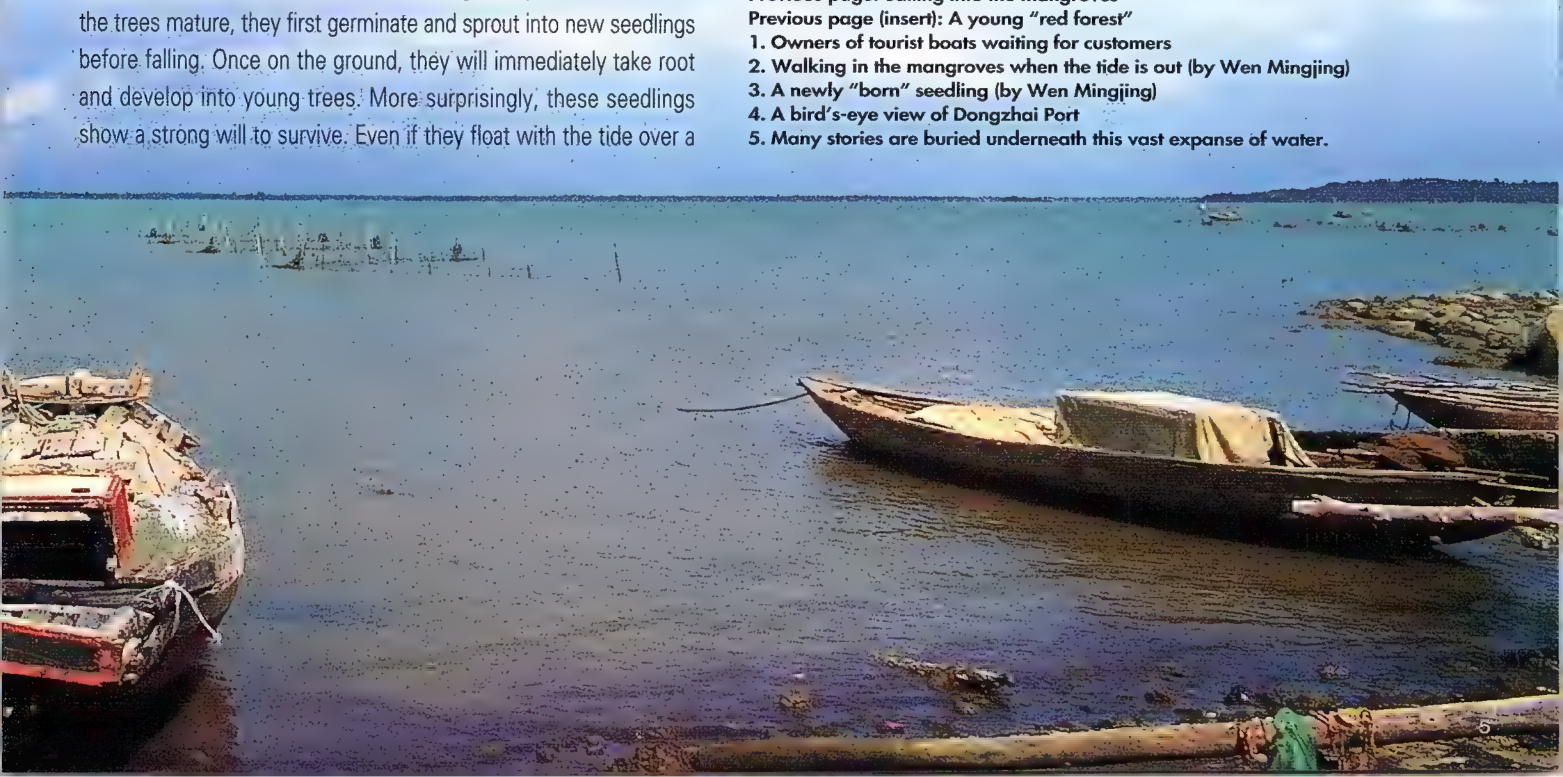
Living Off the Red Forest

At noon, we had lunch at a seafood restaurant, Fragrance of Red Forest, by a port. Surrounded by green trees on three sides and water on the other. The enchanting environment enhanced the good meal served — coconut rice, snails and crabs.

While we were having our meal, the restaurant owner told us that most of the delicacies came from the red forest. He said that the tree leaves became humus and their seeds contained protein; they turned into good fodder for all living things in the water, and thus a source of life for the local people. "So, it can be said we all live off the red forest," he said.

The owner was a native from the nearby Changwei Village. Formerly a fisherman, he had bought a truck to do transport business. Three years ago, he bought one-fifteenth hectare of land here to set up the restaurant. Thanks to his expertise in management and hardworking family members, he managed to repay his 100,000-

Previous page: Sailing into the mangroves
Previous page (insert): A young "red forest"
1. Owners of tourist boats waiting for customers
2. Walking in the mangroves when the tide is out (by Wen Mingjing)
3. A newly "born" seedling (by Wen Mingjing)
4. A bird's-eye view of Dongzhai Port
5. Many stories are buried underneath this vast expanse of water.



In spring, when the water is clear, the village sunk 400 years ago can be seen under the sea; its square and theatre are easily visible.

yuan loan in one year's time. Looking around it was obvious that he indeed did good business; all the tables were full.

The Veteran of the Forest

In the restaurant, we met the restaurant owner's mother, Wang Ruolian, who was 76 years old and still in good health. Wang had been an underground messenger for the Qiongya Column, a local resistance force led by the Communist Party of China during the War of Resistance Against Japan. "At that time," she said, "the enemy was strong and we were weak. Our guerrilla forces had to frequently move deep into the mangrove forest."

"What did you eat and how did you sleep?" I asked.

"We secretly shipped grain into the forest and as well, we ate the tree seedlings. We had makeshift beds in the trees there."

"Did the enemy venture to come into the forest?"

"Of course, they did. However, it was so dense that any stranger would get lost. Moreover, their boats often got stuck in the marsh. Even their firearms didn't have enough power among the dense thickets of trees."

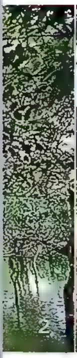
A Fishermen's Haven

As our boat sailed into a wide channel a row of fishing boats berthed by the forest came into sight. We pulled in by the biggest one and found everyone on it watching TV. The whole family lived on the boat. Old Mr. Yang had been a fisherman for more than 40 years and although he also had houses on land not far away, he seldom stayed there because his family spent 10 months every year on the sea. Now, he and his family could earn a total of 30,000-40,000 yuan each year by fishing. "They are all my sons-in-law — all fisherman!" he said, proudly pointing at the young men watching TV.

When asked why they berthed their boat there, Mr. Yang explained that it was a great place to take shelter from the typhoon which had been forecast to be coming in a few days. Indeed, the dense forest of trees provided a perfect haven, and the typhoon would certainly not be able to cause much havoc here.

Villages Under the Clear Sea

Coming out of the Red Forest and turning out beyond a small isle, the sea broadened immediately. Mr. Lin, who drove the boat for us, said that this area sank slowly after the earthquake and all the



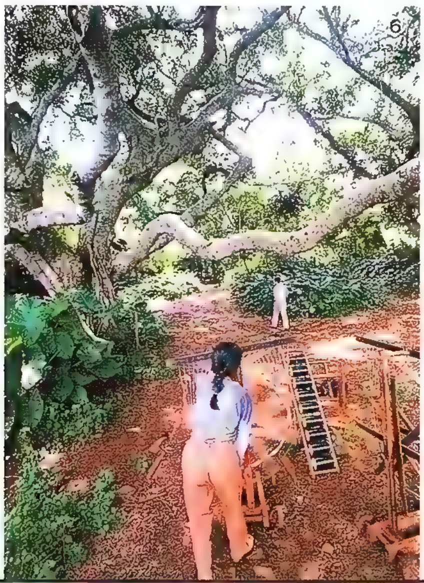
villagers were evacuated in time. He added that the sunken villages could be seen when the water was clear in spring. "In fact," he continued, "it is mainly scholars who come here to look for them. Oh, under our boat now is an old stage."

Listening to his words, we stared intently, but saw nothing but ripples and row upon row of clam-breeding nets directly below the straw huts on the surface of the water. How is it possible that several metres under water here was where people gathered 400 years ago to watch performances? When our boat passed a small port called Qukou, Mr. Lin said, "Underwater here is a large piece of cultivated land. I saw it once. It is only three metres under water and stretches 10 kilometres long. Slightly to the north from here and about three to four kilometres from the Guanqian Bay is the typical site of a sunken village, called Rencun Village. When the water is clear, you can see the courtyards, the ruins of the houses, as well as a nicely built archway."

The Only Survivor of the Earthquake

We continued our journey and came to a narrow passageway, outside of which was a vast expanse of high seas. On one side of the passageway was the Puqian Town of Wenchang County, and on the other side was a small island, which had people living on it.

The more than 1,000 villagers on the island live in three villages: Daotou, Houxi and Shangtian. In that earthquake long ago, the entire area of more than 100 square kilometres sank into sea but this tiny tableland close to the sea survived. It was nothing if not a miracle. In Daotou Village, under the shade of a tree, we found the 88-year-old Mr. Jiang and his 84-year-old wife taking a break on hammocks. Seeing us approach, he asked, "Are you here to collect electricity fees?" He was quite surprised to see visitors.



The old man had had a hard life. A poor orphan, in his youth he had worked as a seaman and been to Hong Kong, Thailand and Vietnam. Later, he worked as a fisherman in the South China Sea and often he was robbed of all his catch. Comparatively, the old woman was in better health and more talkative, joking a lot. We went to the temple in Houxi Village where a statue of the Dragon King stood. It was the biggest and the most outstanding among all the statues worshipped there. The local people may believe that it was the Dragon King who showed them sympathy in that great calamity 400 years ago.

Old Granny Weaving Fishing Nets

Taoyuan (Peach) Village is a small village of 15 households. Though not a peach tree in sight, the quietude and beauty of the village call to mind visions of a secluded Shangri-La. The entire village was immersed in the mangrove forest and its entrance a gathering site for villagers. There, over a dozen hammocks in traditional local style were hung from huge tree branches.

Even in this small village, a surprise awaited us. An old woman, Kuang Niulan, 94 years old, was weaving fishing nets. We found her in good health except for poor hearing. Her son told us his mother had woven fishing nets all her life. Although her movements were slow now, she could still make a fishing net in about 10 days.

Later, we heard that in Yanfeng Town not far away there was a woman of 96 and in Qukou Township, a man of 95. Obviously the local people enjoy longevity here. Do they owe it to the Red Forest?

Translated by Li Zhenguo

1. Taoyuan Village permeated with a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere
2. A vantage point for photographing
3. A stone tablet erected on "Fortune Island"
4. The family who owns the Honglinxiang Restaurant
5. Working at the age of 94
6. A woman of Taoyuan Village weaving palm-fibre rope

Tips for the Traveller

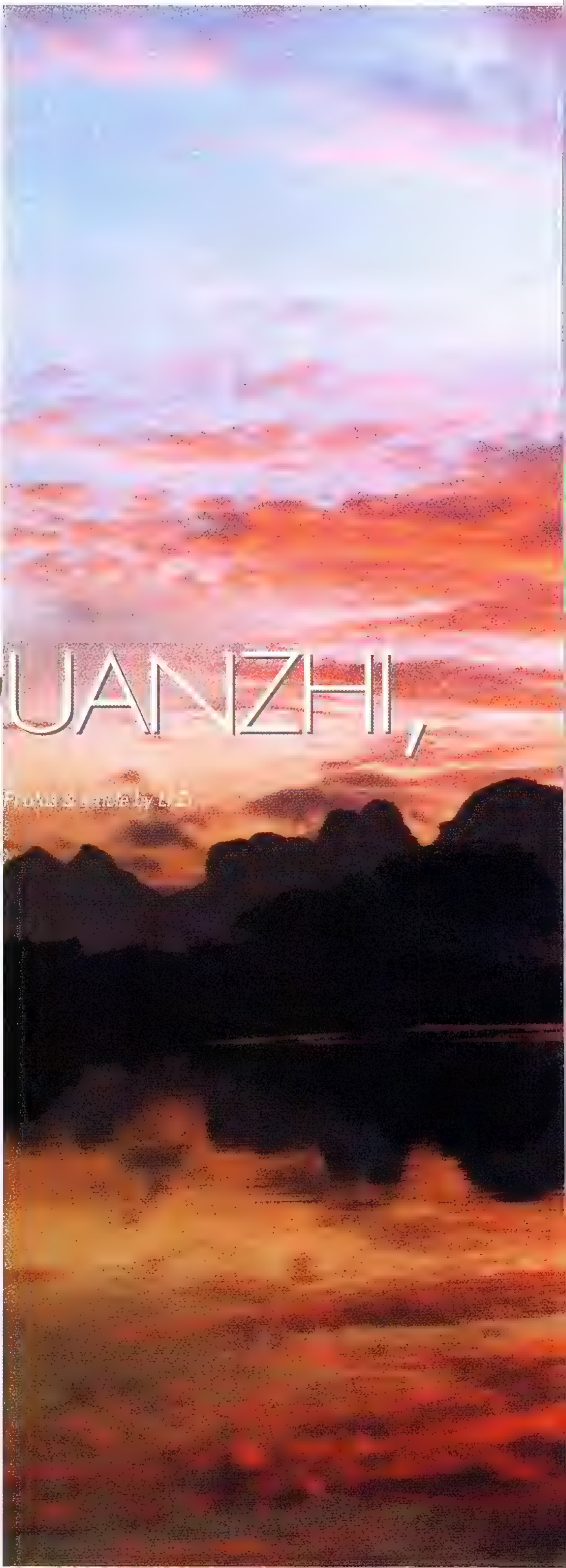
The Dongzhai Port Red Woods Reserve is located in northeast Qiongshan County in Hainan. It extends 50 kilometres along the the seacoast, covering a total area of 35 square kilometres. The reserve is open to tourists; facilities include restaurants, piers for pleasure boats and villas.

Dongzhai Port is 30 kilometres from Haikou, capital of Hainan Province. Buses are available with limited services, so it is more convenient to go by taxi.

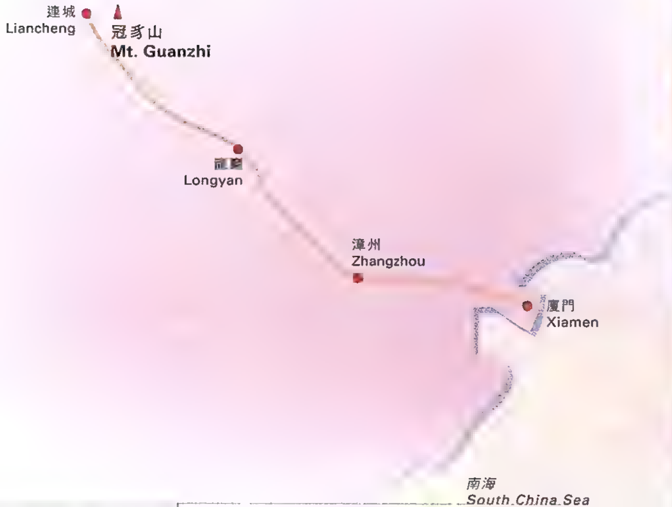
Ningbi Villa built on the Guanzhi Mountain

MT. GUANZHI, BANDIT VILLAGE AND SHIMEN LAKE

Photos & article by Li Zi

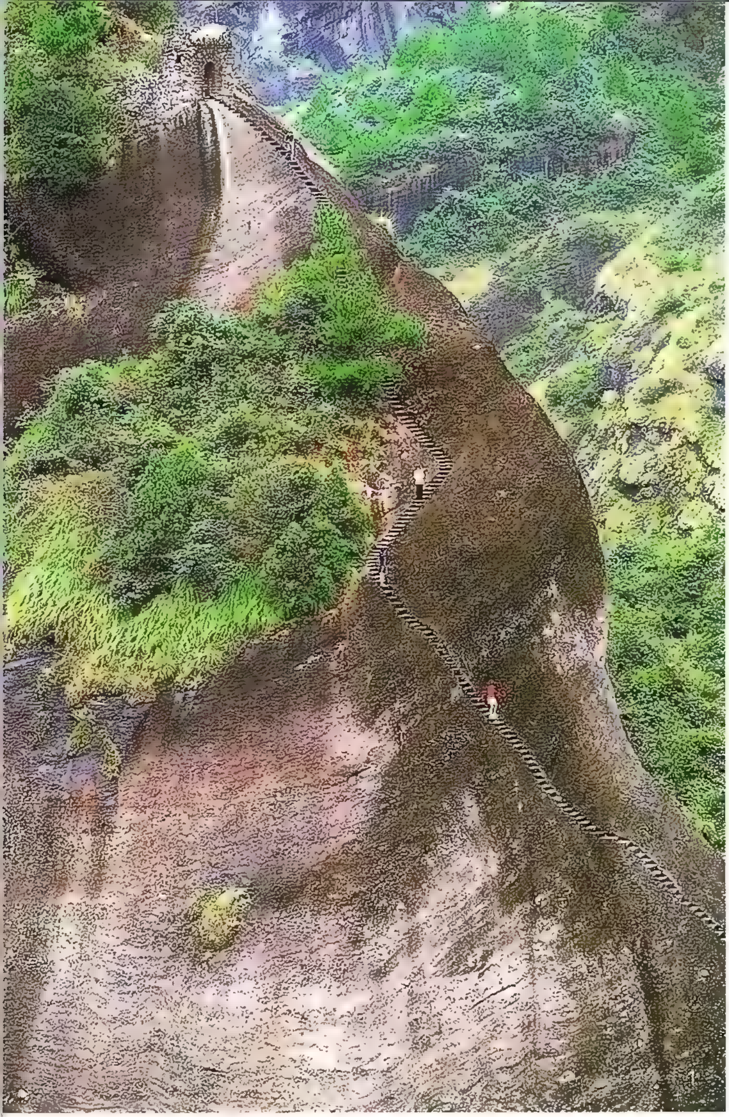


Arriving at Liancheng in Fujian Province on a moon-lit night, I entered my hotel room and opened the rear window. Immediately the vague shadow of Mt. Guanzhi, resembling a lazy drowsy cat under the cool moonlight, came into view.



連城
Liancheng
冠豸山
Mt. Guanzhi
龍巖
Longyan
漳州
Zhangzhou
廈門
Xiamen
南海
South China Sea

Guanzhi Mountain and Shimen Lake at dusk (by Shen Wensheng)



Early the next day, I asked a native of the town what attractions the mountain held for tourists. He informed me that three spots — the mountain, a village and a vast lake — form a unique scene. The village, called Zhu'an, was in the old days a stronghold for bandits, hence its location — on one of the mountain's ridges, the Motian (Skyscraper) Ridge. The Shimen Lake is a lovely stretch of clear water amidst rugged peaks and thick forest. Moreover, Guanzhi Mountain was also a place frequented by visiting ancient scholars.

Climbing Up Like Lizards

With great curiosity we began our climb up the mountain slope to the Zhu'an Village. This is no ordinary mountain slope — there is not one bit of flat area all the way up. The tall, sheer and eerie cliffs become increasingly steep. In the most dangerous part, we all clung to the rock surface like big lizards, for fear of falling into the deep abyss below. We made slow progress but did not even notice how long it took us.

Looking up, we suddenly found we had reached the stone village gate. Although somewhat dilapidated, it still looked quite formidable. Taking a break in front of the gate, we looked down on our route and could only see a sheer stone cliff pointing up to the sky, which one of our fellow travellers said was called the "water gate wall".

The Bandits' Hideaway

Within the village gate is a terrace full of tall wild grass. Their long leaves surge like waves in the wind, exposing the dilapidated walls of old houses. Several decades ago, this place, comprising more than a dozen stone houses, was the hideaway of bandits. For a while, this bandits' den showed considerable prosperity; then the government dispatched troops to attack the hideaway. But, due to the dangers of the mountain route and strong defence works there, the commander simply laid siege, cutting off all supplies to the village. Eventually, even these tough, but starving, bandits had to give up.

1. The "heavenly stairs" reaching Zhu'an Village • 2. The bandits' stronghold has long collapsed. 3. The gate to the bandits' village Zhu'an • 4. Water Gate Wall looks very much like a man-made dam of a reservoir. 5. The Heavenly Pool on top of Motian Ridge

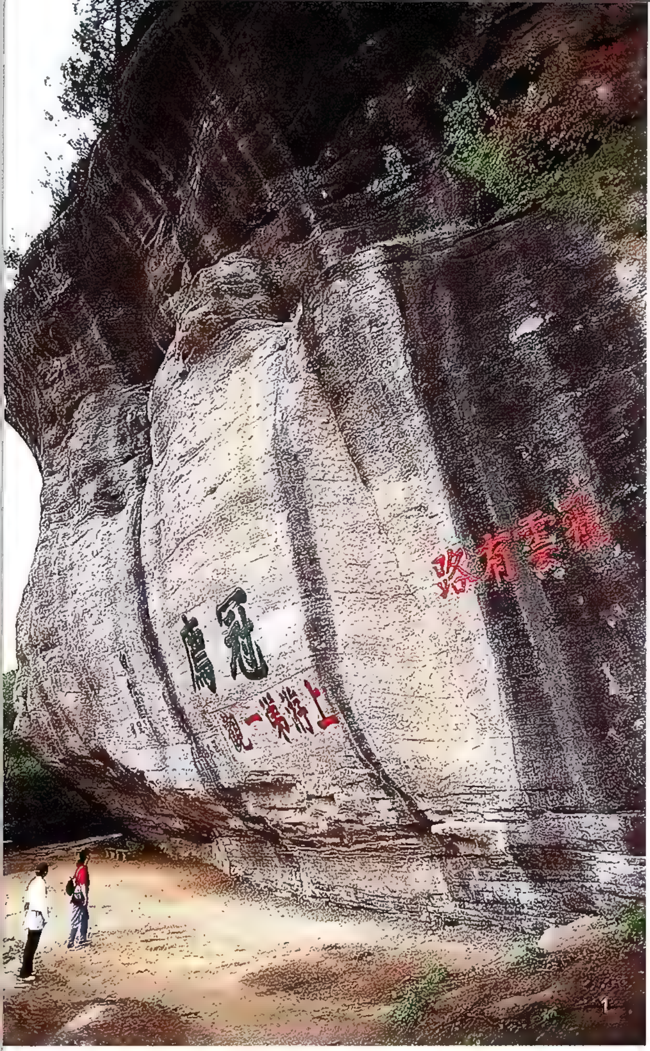
Emerging from the mountain valley, we reached "Fish Back", another precipice, and continued on a trail along the precipice's lonely top, which, totally devoid of plant life, lay just below the mighty heavens. On both sides were bottomless abysses. Carefully following the footsteps chiselled out of the hard stone by former bandits, we moved forward slowly for fear that any mistake would result in eternal regret. Even on such an inaccessible peak, a pillbox stands, complete with five or six embrasures.

A Bare Stairway from Heaven

Reaching the other end of the mountain ridge, we found another stone wall, which would have made the village's defence almost impregnable. Unexpectedly, we saw a clear pool of water, over 30 square metres in size, on top of the mountain ridge that was only about 10 metres wide. As it was filled by rain water, the local people call it the "Heavenly Pool".

Sitting by the pool, we washed our sweat-stained faces with the clear water and immediately felt the comfortable coolness. Looking into the opposite side from the "Fish Back", we could see the steep Motian Ridge.

We then followed the mountain ridge down to the bottom of another valley. The trail was as bare as on top, and we did not see a single blade of grass or a tree, only the stone staircases chiselled out by the bandits like beads dropping down from heaven. At the bottom, we came to another stone gate of the village, which was even more formidable than the previous one. Then we fully understood the dilemma of the government troops.



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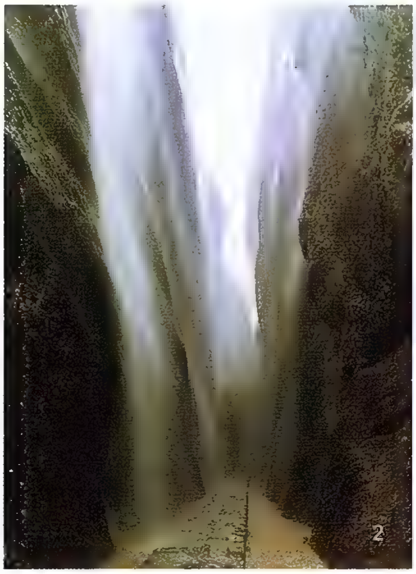
Guanzhi Mountain: A Safe Shelter

We set off for the foot of Guanzhi Mountain, from where we walked leisurely up a winding mountain trail. The entire mountain was covered by forest, which was so dense that, although it was just after noon, it seemed like nightfall. Half way up, a huge boulder blocked our way, on the sheer face of which were carved with the two characters "Guan Zhi". They were the calligraphy of Mr. Hung Gong, a famous scholar in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). According to local records, scholars built schools and lectured on Guanzhi Mountain from the Song Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty (from 960-1911). The mountain was also a place where local folks took refuge in troubled times. The four mountain gates built in ancient times still stand intact in strategic passes on the four routes up the mountain.

Stone Stairs Go Up Narrow Crevices

Between the Wulao (Five Elders) Peak and Lingzhi (Ganoderma) Peak on the top of the mountain was a narrow trail through a 200-metre-deep valley. We walked between the cliffs, and could see only a tiny crevice of sky above, hence the valley's name, Yixian Tian (One-line Sky). Two stone staircases were carved out of cracks in the cliffs on both sides — one leading to Wulao Peak and the other to Lingzhi Peak. Narrow and sheer, they are only wide enough for one person to clamber up on hands and feet like a monkey. The Lingzhi Peak has a spiky top only large enough to hold several people, while the top of Wulao Peak is relatively large and flat. Looking down, I saw the numerous buildings in Liancheng resembling toy building blocks, and the peaks around Zhu'an Village appearing even higher and steeper, almost inaccessible. Turning round, amidst the endless stretch of dense peaks in the distance, I saw an undulating expanse of water — the Shimen (Stone Gate) Lake.

From Wulao Peak, we walked to the Shouxing (Longevity Star) Peak. From a pavilion on its top we could see yet another deep valley, with strangely-shaped rocks jutting up. At the bottom of the valley is a huge and bare cucumber-like stone pillar. A local legend says this was the golden cudgel, a weapon used by the Monkey King, the hero in the classic novel *Pilgrimage to the West*. As it also resembles the genital organ, some people humorously gave it the name "Root of Life".



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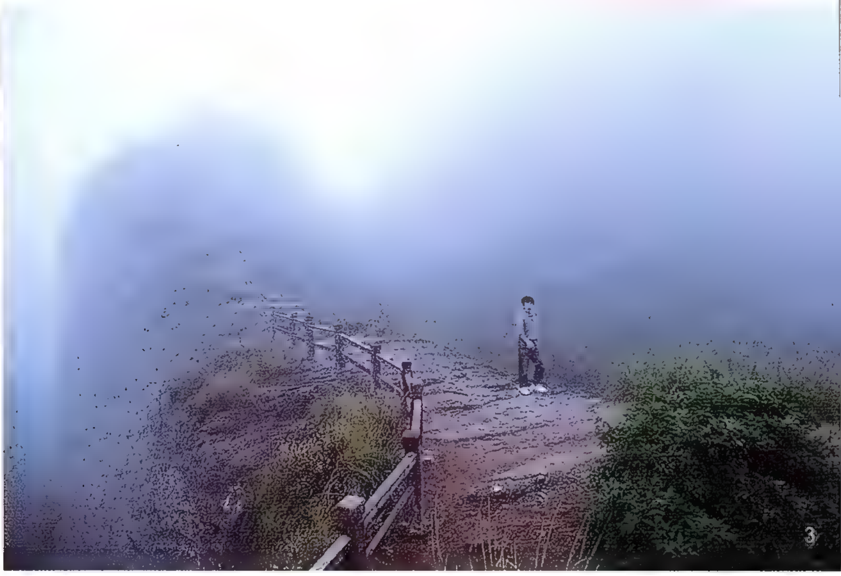

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The Jade Green Hues of Shimen Lake

We made our way down laboriously between seemingly impassable crevices in the cliffs to another marvellous scene — the Shimen Lake we had seen from the Wulao Peak. We thought we had really come to a dead end but just as we were ready to turn back, the roar of a special tourists' boat suddenly reached our ears.

We went aboard and shuttled amidst the mountains. The lake water was clear and glassy, mirroring the dense green pines on the peaks and giving it a jade green hue — an extremely pleasing effect to both the eyes and the mind. In one long inlet, numerous water routes branch out deep into the dense mountain forest on both sides. As the boat chugged along, we heard only gurgling water and chirping birds above a pleasant quietness.

Translated by Z. G. Li

1. Inscriptions left by ancient scholars on the huge rock at Guanzhi Mountain • 2. During heavy-rain days, the narrow valley of One-line Sky becomes a corridor of waterfalls. (by Li Zheng) • 3. Longevity Peak shrouded in mist • 4. Shimen Lake in heavy rain • 5. A cruise on the Shimen Lake provides one with enchanting and refreshing experience.

Tips for the Traveller

Location: From the Liancheng long-distance bus station, motorcycles and minibuses go to Zhu'an Village, Guanzhi Mountain and Shimen Lake for 5 to 10 yuan

Accommodation: Wenquan Hotel and Liancheng Hotel in the county seat, and Guanzhi Mountain Villa at the foot of Mt. Guanzhi. Rate for a standard room is 180 yuan per day

Food: Mainly Hakka-style dishes, such as instant-boiled nine delicacies, taro dumplings, fermented bean curd, eel and bitter lettuce, and pigs' knuckles

Special Local Products: Sun-dried Liancheng sweet potato slices, Yudou beans, water chestnuts, cigu mushrooms and white ducks

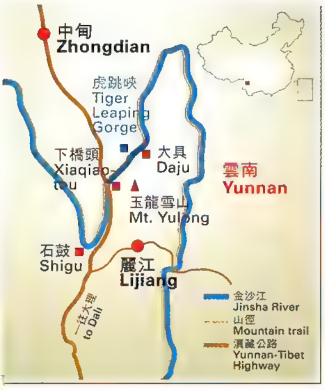
Transport: Direct long-distance bus from Xiamen to Liancheng twice a day

Walking Through the Tiger Leaping Gorge

Photos by Xie Guanghui Article by Yu Ming

On the Jinsha River, which is actually the upper reaches of the Yangtse River, there is a narrow section called Hutiaoxia (Tiger Leaping Gorge). Sandwiched between the Haba and Yulong snow mountains, the waters rushing through the gorge are torrential and the cliffs on the banks unusually steep. The Tiger Leaping Gorge, with its natural and rough features, attracts an increasing number of tourists seeking a thrilling experience.

Located in the border area between Zhongdian and Lijiang counties in Southwest China's Yunnan Province, Tiger Leaping Gorge is 16 kilometres long. Through this section, while the riverbed drops over 200 metres, the mountains on either bank rise 3,900 metres high above the water surface. Called Tiger Leaping Gorge, there is in fact no tiger here. It has been given such a name because the narrowest point of the gorge is only about 30 metres and, legend has it that a tiger once jumped from one side to the other.



On its upper reaches between Shigu (Stone Drum) and Xiaqiaotou, before it reaches the Tiger Leaping Gorge, the Jinsha River is 150-350 metres wide, and the water flows gently, allowing 30-ton ships to pass. Downstream, when it reaches the foot of the Haba and Yulong mountains, the riverbed suddenly narrows to 30 metres, forcing the water to dash through a deep valley and creating a swift current. Six kilometres down from Xiaqiaotou, the Tiger Leaping Rocks further block the river, causing violent whirlpools and surging waves, which dash against the cliffs, creating thunderous roars and sending spray up to shroud the skyscraper-cliffs. It is an unimaginable breathtaking scene.

How to Get there

Fly to Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, which is connected by air with most of the big cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Guilin and Xi'an, and Hong Kong and Macau. From Kunming, you can go by air or by bus to reach either Lijiang or Dali, both charming tourist destinations with beautiful scenery and rich cultural legacies. Then, buses going at regular intervals will take you to the Tiger Leaping Gorge.

At the middle section of the Tiger Leaping Gorge, the river, which is 100 metres lower than its upper stretch, jumps back and forth through a section of riverbed scattered with huge rocks. The rushing currents, dancing waves and spectacular rocks create such a marvellous scene that the spot has been given a charming name Mantianxing, or Stars All Over the Sky. This is an irresistible attraction to tourists to this area.

The currents are even more fascinating further lower at a scenic spot called Flying Rapids. Climbing up Wangxia (Gorge Viewing) Terrace, you will have a wonderful view of the narrow gorge, the turbulent currents and the precipitous peaks of the Haba Snow Mountain. Many dangerous boulders have been formed by the river pushing its way forward.

Walker's Routes

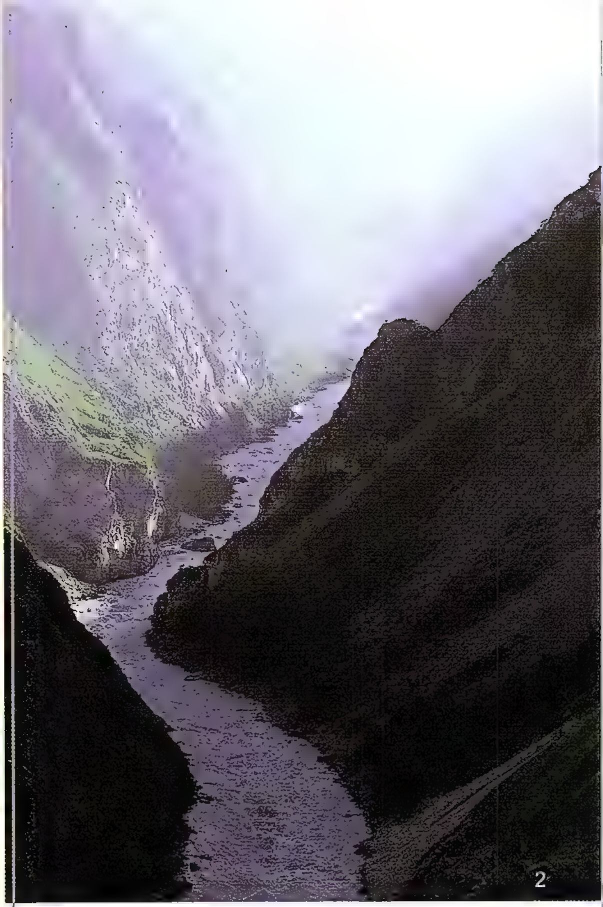
You may choose from the following three ways for travelling on foot, setting off either from Xiaqiaotou in Zhongdian County or from Daju in Lijiang County.

Xiaqiaotou is a popular location to start the Tiger Leaping Gorge tour as it is only nine kilometres from the upper section of the gorge. Although the 32-kilometre highway from Xiaqiaotou to Jiangbian Village near the lower section of the gorge has been completed, most tourists will probably prefer touring the Tiger Leaping Gorge on foot so as to truly experience the mystery of the gorge.

1. Walk along the highway by the river from Xiaqiaotou to Daju New Ferry. On the journey of 18 kilometres, you will pass Yongsheng Village and Hetaoyuan.

Where to Stay

There are about 20 hotels and hostels of various sizes in Xiaqiaotou. The rate for standard rooms ranges from 120 to 180 yuan per person and the cheapest rate can be 8 to 20 yuan per bed. Daju has five hostels, with prices ranging from 8 to 15 yuan per person (no standard rooms available). At Hetaoyuan, there are two hostels, Sean's Guest House and Shanbailian Hostel, each with 40-50 beds at a reasonable rate between 10 to 15 yuan per bed. Dining rooms and TV with four domestic channels are usually available in these hostels.



1. Local men carrying their bundles across the Tiger Leaping Gorge
2. The narrowest point of the Tiger Leaping Gorge is only 30 metres.
3. A strenuous climb, but rewarding in views and photo opportunities
4. Riverside homes in Lijiang

2. Walk upstream along the Jinsha River to Xiaqiaotou: take a boat from Daju to Jiangbian Old Ferry (five kilometres). After walking 800 metres, get on board again to sail further on to the New Ferry (nine kilometres). This is a strenuous route as quite a distance is covered. But this is also a rewarding route for walkers, in particular, photographers who want to see more of the gorge's precipitous scenery and rapids.

3. Explore the ups and downs of the area along a 28-kilometre road. The journey takes about two days, so a tour guide is recommended.

Warning Notes

Walking in the region is relatively strenuous and the usual pace is set at 2 to 3 kilometre per hour. You should not travel alone nor walk too close to the sides of cliffs in case of landfall or slipping. When the wind becomes strong, do not stay for too long near streams, waterfalls and places with danger signs. Walking along the Jinsha River takes quite a lot of energy, especially in summer, so travellers should take with them enough water and food, and perhaps snacks like chocolate.

A Happy Family in the Snow Country

Photos by Yi Yangdong   Article by Xiaoyu & Yangdong

Editor's note: Mr. Yi Yangdong, a Hong Kong backpack-style traveller, loves trekking deep into remote and solitary regions in China. In the last Spring Festival, three generations of his family went to see the white world of snow and ice in the Northeast.

1

As the Spring Festival approached, I pondered where to spend the holiday. Leafing through an old issue of *China Tourism*, I was enticed by scenes of Yabuli, a ski centre in Heilongjiang Province, and thus, the whole family set off there.

A Child Fascinated by Ice

We flew from Hong Kong directly to Jilin City in Jilin Province. Our first stop was Beishan Park. Right at the foot of the mountain in the park was a frozen lake. We had the most terrific fun on this "large chunk of ice", which was a real novelty to my son. He was burning with curiosity about the ice. Later we strolled along the Songhua River to admire the sunset; the rays of the setting sun dyed the clouds as well as the river red, presenting a marvellous painting of Mother Nature.

The White World of Mt. Longtan

Early the next morning, in the freezing air, I took a walk on the bank of Songhua River again. The sun had just risen and the mist over the river, which had not dispersed yet, was stained gold, blurring the scenery in the distance. Some early risers had already gathered on the frozen lake, doing morning exercises or having a stroll. Young lovers also came to immerse themselves in the tranquillity and picturesque scenery.

After breakfast, we drove to the northeast along the charming Songhua River to Mount Longtan. The area abounded with giant trees, and a zigzagging path led all the way up the mountain, where remains left behind from an ancient Korean kingdom, such as the mountain city, Longtan Pond and Longfeng Temple, could be seen. The vast expanse of snow entertained my son immensely. He jubilantly ran

2

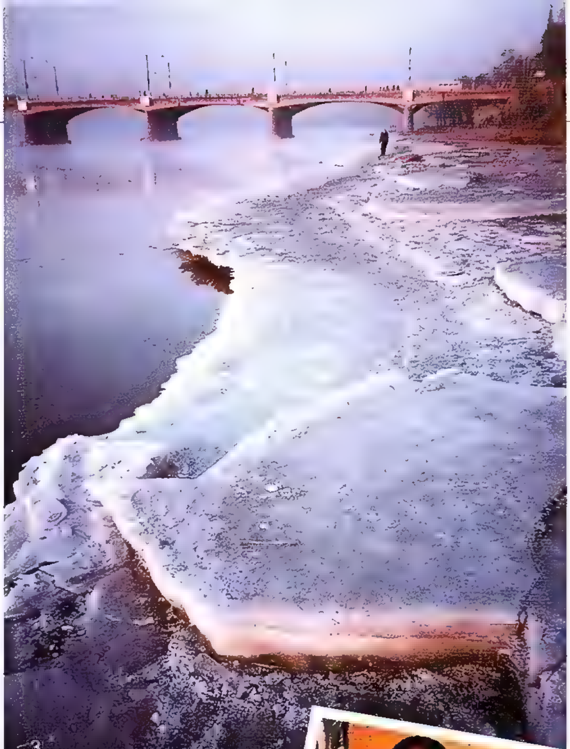
around in it, and made his own "weapons" for a snowball fight.

Dazzling Giant Ice Sculptures

We headed for Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province by rail the next morning and arrived just around lunchtime. The compartments were packed with people hurrying home for the Spring Festival. The most important event in Harbin in winter is the annual Ice Lantern Festival, so we went to Zhaolin Park, the festival venue, just after sunset. The park was thronged with both locals and tourists from home and abroad surveying the numerous gorgeous exhibits. Being surrounded by these glistening ice sculptures, we all became bewitched: the Great Wall, the US Capitol Hill and Moscow's Orthodox Church were all very real amidst the manifold, life-like auspicious animals such as lions and dragons. It was a remarkable experience admiring these stunning sculptures illuminated like lanterns in person. In high spirits, our son scurried amidst these lanterns, playing hide-and-seek with us.

The Wildlife Park for Tigers

On the fourth day, we hired a car to tour around the city. Our first stop was the Northeast China Tiger Park on northern Sun Island. It is the largest wildlife park for tigers in the Northeast and houses some 30 fierce beasts. Yet we were able to get fairly close to observe these animals. Totally oblivious to approaching vehicles such as ours, the tigers were either resting in the warm sun light or licking the snow. Not until the keeper fed them did they regain their vigorous nature: with a roar, they pounced on the live chickens like thunder, and violently tore them to pieces. It was another unique scene for our wide-eyed son.

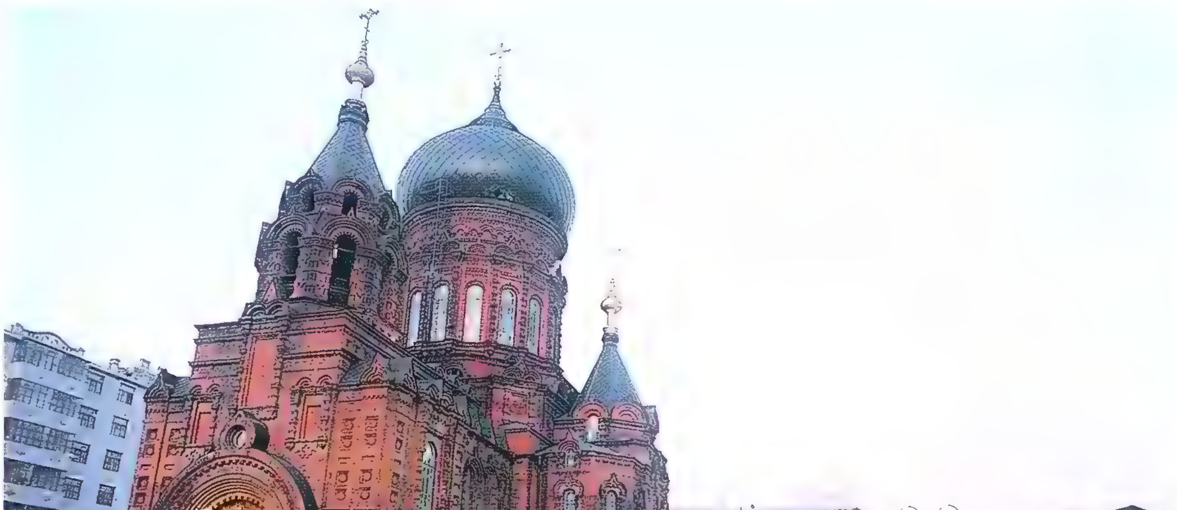


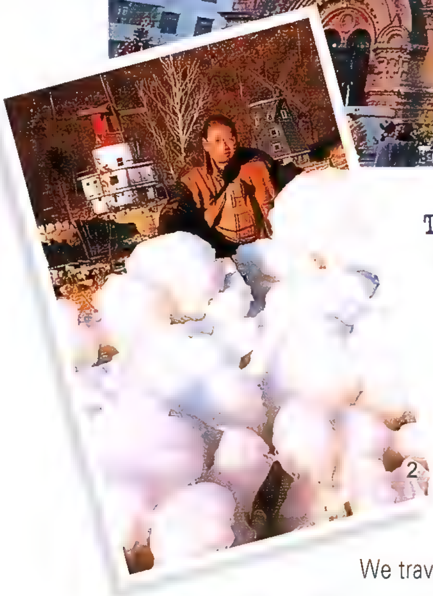
A Street 'Paved with Silver'

We left for the Sun Island Park nearby after our wildlife tour. The park was the venue of a large-scale snow sculpture competition and hundreds of the competitors' works of varied styles and themes, concrete and abstract, were displayed. Apart from the wonderful sculptures, the park also offered a wide range of winter activities like sledding, skating and wind-sailing on the Songhua River. We had a brilliant time there until we were urged to go by our grumbling stomachs.

We preceeded on to the celebrated Central Street teeming with shops and restaurants and crowded with tourists. "Can you tell what is so special about this street?" asked our driver. Not until then did we discover that the street was paved with bricks. At the beginning of the century, the local warlord imported these bricks from abroad at a cost of one tael of silver each (an immense expense at the time) to lay the street. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the street was paved with silver. In order to protect this expensive street, the municipal government had marked it a restricted area for pedestrians only. We later visited the solemn and grand St. Sophia's Church nearby.

1. Having fun in the snow in Beishan Park, Jilin City
2. The Yabuli Ski Centre
3. The icy bank of the Songhua River
4. The tasty and nutritious ginseng and chicken hotpot
5. Look! The ice lanterns are gorgeous!





The Fun of Sledding

Early in the morning on the fifth day, we took a taxi to the Yuquan Ski Centre, where a ski hill and budget accommodations were available. We travelled up the mountain on horses. Amidst this boundless world of snow, we felt like we were standing on a giant fresh cream cake.

After lunch we each had our own sled to speed down the snowy slope. It was again a new experience for my young son, who attacked the slope with excited vigour.

We hurried back to the Central Street at dusk, when the tourist spot was glistening with neon lights. We had dinner at the Huamei Western Food Restaurant famed for its Russian cuisine and exquisite decor. Dining on the magnificently-adorned second floor, we felt like we were guests in the Tsar's palace.

Leaving Yabuli

In the morning of the last day of our trip, we left for the Yabuli Ski Centre. The centre can be easily reached by a four-hour taxi or a 10-yuan mini-bus trip. Arriving there, we first had lunch at the Fengche (Windmill) Village before renting ski equipment and trying out our technique in the snow. Since my son was not feeling well that day, he was not very cheerful until we rode in a horse-drawn sledge up the mountain; it was the last novelty of the trip for him.

Snow dropped gently on Yabuli as we prepared to leave, just as if the heavens were persuading us to stay. Farewell, Yabuli! Yet we will surely come again very soon.

Translated by Jess Tang

1. **St. Sophia's Church**
2. **Grandpa amidst a pile of snow at Windmill Village, Yabuli**
3. **A friendly "tiger" inside the wildlife park**

Highlights of Issue No. 225

by Xie Guanghui

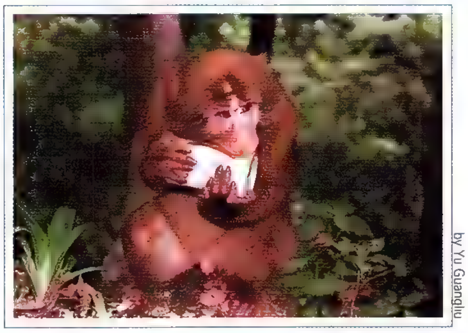
In Tibet, our reporter left Lhasa and followed three routes to further explore this region. Follow him to the ***Nagqu Horse-racing Festival****, the most lavishly celebrated festival in northern Tibet; on the quest for a distant view of the solemn and grand* ***Qomolangma Peak*** *from the highest monastery on earth; and to the origins of the ancient Tibetan kingdom in* ***Shannan*** *in the sub-tropical atmosphere of southern Tibet... Six photography buffs also share their experiences of travelling in this sacred land.*

by Shi Baoxiu

If you are an enthusiastic admirer of chinaware, mark our introduction to the renowned ***porcelain-producing centres*** *in China. Here you will find listings and details of all the important points, including the history, characteristics, quality, and price of each type of traditional Chinese crafts. We will also introduce you to an American lady who learned how to make pottery in Jingdezhen.*

by Peng Zhen'ge

An interesting story featuring a group of ***monkeys inhabiting Mount Emei*** *will surely catch your attention. See whether greed or reason rule in these animals' behaviour. Moreover, you will be offered tips on how to get along with these clever, yet naughty creatures.*



by Yu Guangliu

INDEX

ISSUE	ANHUI	PAGE
188	A River-and-Lake Tour	8
199	Wuhu Iron Pictures	79
207	Touring Along the Beijing-Kowloon Railway	16
216	Bozhou Sesame Seed Cakes	54

ISSUE	BEIJING	PAGE
188	"Yan Can Cook" in Beijing	34
194	Cloisonné	82
195	In Search of My "Cuppa"	74
197	Beijing — the Heart of One Billion	54
198	Celebrating Spring and the New Year, the Traditional Way	16
206	A Night at the Hard Rock Cafe in Beijing	50
207	Touring Along the Beijing-Kowloon Railway	16
213	Mysterious Ancient Cliff Dwellings	60
215	Three Summer Vacation Sites Out of Beijing	16
216	The Ming Imperial Waxworks Palace in Beijing	34
218	The Great Wall: Adding to Nature's Formidability	22
220	Where to Go in Multi-hued Autumn	44

ISSUE	FUJIAN	PAGE
210	Xiamen: A Beautiful Port City by the Taiwan Strait	76
212	Celestial Dwelling in the Wuyi Mountains	64
215	A World of Strange Rocks	68

ISSUE	GANSU	PAGE
188	Lucid and Lively Knifework — the Appeal of Han-Dynasty Wood Engravings	66
190	Unfolding Giant Thangka at Langmu Monastery	68
191	A Solo Motorcycle Trip to Huangcheng Grassland	48
197	Spicy Beef Noodles — Lanzhou Flavour	72
197	Playing on the Fantastic Sand Dunes	76
198	Celebrating Spring and the New Year, the Traditional Way	16
198	Struggle Through the Gobi Desert	76
199	Dunhuang: Story and Treasures	26
202	A Journey Through the Hexi Corridor	12
203	1,500 Kilometres by Motorcycle	82
207	Tasting Melons Along the Silk Road	62
210	Silk Road Express — Travelling Along the Silk Road by Train	56
211	Lanzhou — A City on the Yellow River	68
216	Tradition Lives Among the Baima	58
218	An Excursion to Yumen Pass	14
218	Aksay — Home of the Kazaks	80

ISSUE	GUANGDONG	PAGE
186	Enjoying Tea at Panxi Restaurant	66
188	A Second Lan Kwai Fong — Western-Style Bars in Shenzhen	48
189	Shenzhen Bay — A Dreamland for Relaxation	26
189	Guangzhou Book Centre, Tianhe — China's Largest "Book City"	54
189	A Grand Prayer Ceremony at Shenzhen's Hongfa Temple	65
193	Guangzhou, the Southern Metropolis	34
198	Shenzhen, a City Built Within 15 Years	50
198	Returning to the Green World	70
199	Excursions to Guangdong	10
203	Panyu — Ancient City Striving for Modernisation	60
206	A Shopping Street in Guangzhou — the Qingping Market	58
207	The China River on Which Hong Kong Depends	68
211	Masterpieces of Art — Chaozhou Embroidered Tapestries	66
212	Dongguan — An Energetic, Self-Made City	76
214	Foshan: A Rising Star in the Pearl River Delta	68
216	The Joy of Getting Drenched — At the Water Splashing Festival	80
220	A Learning Tour in Chaozhou: Gongfu Tea, Snacks and Ceramics	32

ISSUE	GUANGXI	PAGE
186	The Deep Quiet West Mountain in Guiping	62
187	Chorus of Lusheng Pipes — Gulongpo Fair on Damiao Mountain in Guangxi	66
191	The Sanyuesan Festival of the Bouyei	44
194	Longsheng Hot Spring	72
196	Seeing Greater Guilin on a Bike	22
206	The "Stone Fiend" and the Rare Stones Museum	60
208	Back to Nature — An Eight-Day Tour Among Ethnic Minorities from Guiyang to Guilin	25
209	A Scenic Village in the Embrace of Nature	12
213	Golden Spring in Southwest China	8
215	A Boundary Waterfall	10
216	The City of Beihai — Sun, Sand and Sea	18
217	Tourism Among the Forests	76

ISSUE	GUIZHOU	PAGE
190	Animal Fights in Shanghai	66
192	The Primitive Paper-Cut Totem of Yelang	50
192	Visiting the Horn-Haired Miao People	64
195	Rafting Along the Maling River	60
196	Guizhou Batik	64
199	The Colourful Miao	64
201	The Rivers That Flow Liquor	38
208	Back to Nature — An Eight-Day Tour Among Ethnic Minorities from Guiyang to Guilin	25
213	Golden Spring in Southwest China	8
220	The Fish-Catching Festival of the Miao	72

ISSUE	HAINAN	PAGE
209	The Li People in Hainan	72
210	Farmers on Hainan Island: Stories of Returned Overseas Chinese	34
212	New Ways of Visiting Hainan Island	12

ISSUE	HEBEI	PAGE
187	The Longevity Inscriptions on Longevity Mountain	36
199	Bashang — A Fragrant Grassland	70
201	Walking Through the Taihang Mountains	74
212	Tasting Seafood at Beidaihe	58
215	Three Summer Vacation Sites Out of Beijing	16
218	A Wildlife Park: Mixing People and Animals	58
219	Baiyangdian Lake — A Gem on the Vast North China Plain	36
220	Where to Go in Multi-hued Autumn	44

ISSUE	HEILONGJIANG	PAGE
197	Winter Fun in the Land of Snow	22
202	Harbin — A Charming City by the Songhua River	68
203	Lieba Bread from Harbin	72
206	Chasing Autumn in Northeast China	12
206	Astronomers Worldwide Flock to Mohe	64
208	Where the Snowfall is Heaviest	42
210	Birch Bark Art Works	62
211	Skiing Holiday in the Northeast	20
212	Ice and Snow Carvings: the Frozen Art	70
220	Where to Go in Multi-hued Autumn	44
220	Recapturing Autumn in the North	48

ISSUE	HENAN	PAGE
186	The Splendour and Charm of Henan Folk Dance	34
187	The Largest Temple Fair in China — Ancestral Grandfather's Temple Fair	32
189	Flying from the Top of Linlü Mountain in Henan	52
190	Peonies of Luoyang, the Best under Heaven	32
191	"Yan Can Cook" in Luoyang and Shaolin Temple	40
195	Learning Martial Arts at Shaolin Temple	28
195	Village Kilns Fire Tang Tri-Colour Pottery	68
201	Walking Through the Taihang Mountains	74
220	Majie Melody Festival	80

ISSUE	H.K./MACAU	PAGE
187	Climbing Victoria Peak with Five Different Routes	70
204-5	Hong Kong — Wonders Never Cease	14
204-5	Central and Western Districts — A Montage of Past and Present	22
204-5	Heart of Kowloon — Tsim Sha Tsui, Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok	30
204-5	Ocean Park — Endless Surprises	40
204-5	The Outlying Islands and Beaches — Hong Kong's Peaceful Gardens	48
204-5	Lantau Island: Too Much to See in One Day	56
204-5	From Tsing Ma Bridge to the Gold Coast	64
204-5	Museums — Soul of the Metropolis	72
204-5	The New Look of the Convention and Exhibition Centre	80
204-5	Leisure Activities in Hong Kong	82
204-5	An Epicurean Paradise	86
204-5	Shoppers' Paradise	92

ISSUES 186 — 221 (1-1996 — 12-1998)

Note: Articles are listed according to province, autonomous region, municipality and special administrative region. Macau is also included.

208	The Hong Kong Trail — Section One	78
209	A Day at Clear Water Bay	78
211	Shing Mun Park — A Green Museum; Hibiscus Hill — A Sacred Retreat	80
213	Breeze and Waves at Western Big Wave Bay	80
214	Life is Art — A Visit to Yabo Tea Garden	82
215	A Break on Lamma Island	78
219	The Bun Festival in Cheung Chau	62

ISSUE	HUBEI	PAGE
192	The Story of the Three Gorges	8
194	Wuhan, a Yangtse City	34
195	The Amazing Green-Haired Turtle	81
214	The Lotus Couple	74
219	Yuanji Exercises on Lianhua Mountain	60
219	Roulianxiang — the Folk Dance and Its Disciple	74

ISSUE	HUNAN	PAGE
186	Zhang Baohua's Finger Paintings	38
190	Spectacular Peaks & Limpid Waters	8
190	Pack Baskets of Western Hunan	80
197	Winter Fun in the Land of Snow	22

ISSUE	INNER MONGOLIA	PAGE
186	Hot, Bubbling Springs for Celestial Beings — Hot Springs in Halun Arxan	68
199	Mongolian Yurt Hotels: A Unique Travel Experience	46
199	Alashan Mongolian Roasted Lamb	80
203	Overview of the Inner Mongolian Grasslands	14
210	Hasu — A Beautiful Lake Beyond the Great Wall	65
213	Motorcycling Alone to Ejin in Inner Mongolia	50
216	Fish Dishes in Inner Mongolia	53
217	Mongolian Metalwork	64

ISSUE	JIANGSU	PAGE
186	The Best of Han-Dynasty Stone Relief Carvings	74
194	Nanjing Kaleidoscope	52
196	The Charm and Serenity of Suzhou	38
201	Zhouzhuang — A Small, Ancient Town in Southeast China	50
201	The Peacock Lady	82
206	Love God, Love Life, Pursue Happiness — Students in a Christian Seminary	74
214	In the World of "Outlaws of the Marsh"	54
221	Big Gate Crabs of Yangcheng Lake	66

ISSUE	JIANGXI	PAGE
186	In the Depths of Lushan Mountain	8
194	Dragon and Tiger Mountain — A Karst Landscape	8
197	Winter Fun in the Land of Snow	22
201	Sanqing Mountain — Where Tranquillity Reigns	30
206	Liukeng — An Ancient Village Untouched by Time	32
207	Touring Along the Beijing-Kowloon Railway	16
207	The China River on Which Hong Kong Depends	68
220	Where to Go in the Multi-hued Autumn	44

ISSUE	JILIN	PAGE
197	Winter Fun in the Land of Snow	22
206	Chasing Autumn in Northeast China	12
210	The Koreans in the Northeast	70
216	Traditional Chinese Medicines of Jilin	56
220	Where to Go in Multi-hued Autumn	44

ISSUE	LIAONING	PAGE
192	The Mystery of Mt. Haitang	54
196	Dalian: Gateway to Northeast China	51
197	Winter Fun in the Land of Snow	22
203	The Picturesque Painters' Village	54
206	Chasing Autumn in Northeast China	12
209	The Golden Rock Beach in Autumn	48
209	The Jade Carvings at Xiuyan	56
211	Football Fans' Bar in Dalian	60
215	Black Cuisine — Tasty Ant Dishes	52
217	Dalian — Harbour City in Northern China	12
220	Where to Go in Multi-hued Autumn	44

ISSUE	NINGXIA	PAGE
198	Hui — the Chinese Muslims	60

ISSUE	QINGHAI	PAGE
188	Longyang — A Gorge at the South of the Yellow River	70
197	The Charm of Qinghai Lake	8
206	Tales of a Lone Traveller	68
210	A Very Special Trip to Qinghai Lake	12
213	Rigoin: Homeland of the Buddha's Painters	36

ISSUE	SHAANXI	PAGE
188	Simple Works of Art Full of Rustic Charm — Yijun Farmer Paintings in Northern Shaanxi	54
188	Murals Depicting Country Life — the Tomb of a Tang-Dynasty Prince	69
189	Traversing the Yellow River Canyon in Winter	8
189	"Yan Can Cook" in Xi'an	48
190	Terracotta Warriors & Horses — the Eighth Wonder of the World	56
190	Paying Homage at the Yellow Emperor Mausoleum	72
191	Brightly-Coloured and Strangely-Shaped Fengxiang Folk Art	52
191	Wonders of the Qin Mausoleum	80
196	Bronze Vessels of the Western Zhou Dynasty	58
198	Celebrating Spring and the New Year, the Traditional Way	16
201	Xi'an — A City of Glory and Imperial Mystery	14
208	Celebration of a Baby's First Month of Life	76
218	Xi'an: Tracking Its Imperial Antiquities	16
218	The Great Wall: Adding to Nature's Formidability	22

ISSUE	SHANDONG	PAGE
188	Moving Art on the Beach — the Works of Crabs	44
191	A Tour of Confucius' Hometown	10
191	Brush Pens and the "Three Treasures"	66
202	The Acrobats of Liaocheng	40
207	Touring Along the Beijing-Kowloon Railway	16
209	Folklore, Art and Good Luck Wishes — New Year Paintings from Yangjiabu	66
215	A Sky of Kites	56
219	The Yuncheng Wushu School	76
220	Holiday Pleasures in Qingdao	13

ISSUE	SHANGHAI	PAGE
190	Old Jazz Band of Shanghai Peace Hotel	50
190	Animal Fights in Shanghai	66
192	Martin Yan in Shanghai	58
199	Shanghai — the Grand City	52
221	Shanghai: A Happy Blend of Old and New	18

ISSUE	SHANXI	PAGE
186	Lights for Redeeming the Lost Souls — the River Lantern Festival at the Ancient Ferry in Shanxi	46
188	The Golden Light Temple — A Famous Grotto in Taihang Mountains	40
188	An Ancient Fortress at Zhangbi, Shanxi	50
188	Four Cities of Shanxi	72
189	Traversing the Yellow River Canyon in Winter	8
191	Xuanzhong Monastery — Birthplace of the Sukhavati Sect	70
193	"Mountain Herb Eggs"	81
198	Celebrating Spring and the New Year, the Traditional Way	16
201	Taiyuan Wheaten Food Shop	60
201	Walking Through the Taihang Mountains	74
209	A Journey into Paradise, Hell and the Mundane World	20
216	Cave Dwellings — Homes on the Loess Plateau	40
216	Three Special Collections in Shanxi	77
218	The Great Wall: Adding to Nature's Formidability	22
219	Be an Eighth Route Army Soldier at Huangya Pass	30
220	Pingyao: Remnant of a Bygone Century	50

ISSUE	SICHUAN	PAGE
187	Initiation of 500 Monks at the 500 Arhats Temple	50
187	The Dwarfs Village	74
188	Jay Cochrane's Tightrope Walk Across the Yangtse Gorge	38
188	Exploring the Dêgê Scripture Printing House	57
190	The Oriental Capital of Buddhas — A New Sanctuary in Leshan	44

China
CHINA TOURISM

INDEX

191	Heavenly Pit and Earthly Crevice — Natural Scenery in Sichuan Province	54
192	The Story of the Three Gorges	8
193	Colourful Leaves of Miyaluo	6
193	Consummate Skill in Sichuan Opera	44
193	Restaurant Specialising in Chaoshou	80
195	Sichuan Bamboo Articles	79
195	An Encounter with the Panda	80
196	Rediscover Nature Along Sichuan-Tibet Highway	8
196	Festival Celebrations at Mount Liangshan	70
197	Winter Fun in the Land of Snow	22
197	Insight into the Mosuo Community	40
198	Celebrating Spring and the New Year, the Traditional Way	16
198	Restaurant Famous for Medicinal Food	67
201	The Rivers that Flow Liquor	38
202	Mt. Ma'an — A Natural Botanical Garden	32
202	The Qiang People	62
203	Longquanyi: the Charm of Spring	32
206	A Master Tea Maker in Chengdu	76
208	Daocheng — A Snowy Forest Region	16
208	Chongqing — the Rising Municipality on Upper Yangtse	66
209	Exploring Fossil Glaciers at Luoji Mountain	58
210	Lhoke and His Sons	85
212	Exploring the Southern Slope of Mount Gongga	48
214	Furong Cave: A Myriad of Sensations	12
215	An Antiques Night Market in Chengdu	55
216	Hailuo Gully — A Glacier Park	12
216	White Stone Bank	38
216	Tradition Lives Among the Baima	58
217	Fengdu — the Ghost City	28
217	The Giant Panda and Friends	34
217	Zhongyan — A Place of Romance	70
218	The "Steaming Feast" in Chengdu	12
220	The New Circular Route to Jiuzhaigou — A Symphony of Colour and Water	14
220	Journey to a Dream — Driving on the Southwest Highland	62
220	The Boat-shaped Town of Luocheng	74
221	Searching for the Qingcheng Mountain Story	76

ISSUE	TIANJIN	PAGE
213	Tianjin — A Northern China Port City	66
214	A World of Painted Clay Figurines	78

ISSUE	TIBET	PAGE
192	Adventure to Qomolangma, the World's Highest Peak	68
196	Rediscover Nature Along Sichuan-Tibet Highway	8
202	Eighty Days Around the Sacred Yamzho Yum Lake	56
202	Studying Buddhism at the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau	78
203	Trudging Towards the Qomolangma	38
206	Tales of a Lone Traveller	68
208	Trekking to Medog in Tibet	60
211	Experiencing the Holiness of Lake Namco	12
214	Adventures in the Namjagbarwa Canyon of Tibet	38
220	Journey to a Dream — Driving on the Southwest Highland	62

ISSUE	XINJIANG	PAGE
186	Keriya People in the Taklimakan Desert	54
187	A Winter Trip to Kanas Lake	54
189	Kanas Lake — A Little Piece of Heaven	74
191	Desert Scenery in Xinjiang	36
191	Adventure into Devil's Ravine — A Visit to the Valley of Xinjiang's Kuqa River	58
194	Life, Culture & Sand — A Journey Along the Silk Road	20
198	The Land of Xinjiang	34
198	Unique Musical Instruments of the Uygur People	68
206	The Daolang Dance Festival	44
206	Nang — the Xinjiang Pizza	56
212	Highway Running Through the Desert	32
212	Receiving Sand Therapy in the Flame Mountain	60
212	Russian Community in Xinjiang	82
216	Floating on Hotan River in the Taklimakan Desert	64
217	A Motor Ride Around the Junggar Basin	48
218	Looking for the Bleeding River	66
219	Traversing the Formidable, Deadly Lop Nur	12
219	Your Guided Tour of Xinjiang	78
221	A World of Snow in Summer — Impressions of Bogda Peak	58

ISSUE	YUNNAN	PAGE
186	Music Played by the Earth	41
187	Yunlong — the Home of Bridges	46
188	Funeral at the Foot of Ailao Mountain	45
189	The Yiche People's Kuzhazha Festival in the Ailao Mountains	62
189	Mysterious Ancient Bronze Weapons Unearthed in Yunnan	68
192	Dai-Style Brocade	79
192	Adventure to Tropical Xishuangbanna	80
193	The Mountain Sculptors	18
193	Exploring the Stone Forests in Lunan	48
193	The Conquest of the Snowy Haba Mountain — A Story of Amateur Climbers	70
194	The Dai People in Yunnan	74
195	A Journey Around Dianchi Lake	46
196	What a Wonderful World	78
197	Insight into the Mosuo Community	44
197	Journey into Jiaozi Snow Mountain	86
198	Gao, the Grasshopper-Maker	82
201	The Yi Waiters — Dancing While Serving	68
203	Preserving Cultural Gems	74
207	The Hanis in Yunnan	56
209	Liuyi Village: Last Home of Ladies with Bound Feet	34
211	The Bai People of Yunnan	74
213	Golden Spring in Southwest China	8
214	Dali, an Ancient Town with a Western Touch	20
215	Into the World Called Shangri-La	34
215	An Australian Woman Marries in China	64
215	Tibetan Christians in a Yunnan Village	84
216	Bu Nong and His Bells	76
217	Encounters with a Hotel Owner in Zhongdian	65
217	Anning Holiday Resort: Hot Spring Bathing	66
217	A Vacation in Xishuangbanna	82
218	The Blossoming Dounan Village	70
218	Kunming: World Gardening Expo '99	78
219	Visit Villages in Yunnan	50
219	Aiming High in Life — Rock Climbing in Kunming	70
220	Journey to a Dream — Driving on the Southwest Highland	62

ISSUE	ZHEJIANG	PAGE
188	A River-and-Lake Tour	8
192	The Last Leather-Silhouette Show	74
206	Wedding Ceremony of the Nine Clans Fisher Folk	78
209	A Restaurant Entertaining Statesmen	54
210	An Expedition to Korea on a Bamboo Raft	48
213	Nanxi River: Five Options for Sightseeing	16
215	Ningbo — A Vibrant City by the East China Sea	72
217	The Kingdom of Giant Trees	44
220	Shaoxing Food: Smelly Attractions	12

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES ARE LISTED ACCORDING TO THE CONTENT.

ISSUE	FOLK CULTURE, ARTS AND CUSTOMS	PAGE
186	The Splendour and Charm of Henan Folk Dance	34
186	Zhang Baohua's Finger Paintings	38
186	Lights for Redeeming the Lost Souls — the River Lantern Festival at the Ancient Ferry in Shanxi	46
186	The Best of Han-Dynasty Stone Relief Carvings	74
187	Choosing Local Specialties	28
187	The Largest Temple Fair in China — Ancestral Grandfather's Temple Fair	32
187	Chorus of Lusheng Pipes — Gulongpo Fair on Damiao Mountain in Guangxi	66
187	Chen Yan's Tree-Root Carvings	69
188	Moving Art on the Beach — the Works of Crabs	44
188	Funeral at the Foot of Ailao Mountain	45
188	Simple Works of Art Full of Rustic Charm — Yijun Farmer Paintings in Northern Shaanxi	54
188	Lucid and Lively Knifework — the Appeal of Han-Dynasty Wood Engravings	66
188	Murals Depicting Country Life — the Tomb of a Tang-Dynasty Prince	69
189	Crazy about Stone — Seal Handle Engraving	60
189	Mysterious Ancient Bronze Weapons Unearthed in Yunnan	68
189	The Art of Chinese Gardens	82
190	Festival Revelry	38

ISSUES 186 — 221 (1·1996 — 12·1998)

190	Pack Baskets of Western Hunan	80
191	A Tour of Confucius' Hometown	10
191	Brightly-Coloured and Strangely-Shaped Fengxiang Folk Art	52
191	Brush Pens and the "Three Treasures"	66
192	The Primitive Paper-Cut Totem of Yelang	50
192	The Last Leather-Silhouette Show	74
192	Dai-Style Brocade	79
193	Consummate Skill in Sichuan Opera	44
194	Life, Culture & Sand — A Journey Along the Silk Road	20
194	The Charm of Ancient Chinese Gardens	44
194	Cloisonné	82
195	Village Kilns Fire Tang Tri-Colour Pottery	68
195	In Search of My "Cuppa"	74
195	Sichuan Bamboo Articles	79
196	The Charm and Serenity of Suzhou	49
196	Bronze Vessels of the Western Zhou Dynasty	58
196	Guizhou Batik	64
198	Celebrating Spring and the New Year, the Traditional Way	16
198	Unique Musical Instruments of the Uygur People	68
199	Dunhuang: Story and Treasures	26
199	Wuhu Iron Pictures	79
200	Marrying the Chinese Way	40
201	The Brilliant Art of Bronze Mirror	64
202	The Acrobats of Liaocheng	40
203	The Picturesque Painters' Village	54
206	The Daolang Dance Festival	44
206	Wedding Ceremony of the Nine Clans Fisher Folk	78
208	Celebration of a Baby's First Month of Life	76
209	The Jade Carvings at Xiuyan	56
209	Folklore, Art and Good Luck Wishes — New Year Paintings from Yangjiabu	66
210	Birch Bark Art Works	62
211	Masterpieces of Art — Chaozhou Embroidered Tapestries	66
212	Ice and Snow Carvings: the Frozen Art	70
214	A World of Painted Clay Figurines	78
216	The Ming Imperial Waxworks Palace in Beijing	34
216	The Joy of Getting Drenched — At the Water Splashing Festival	80
217	Mongolian Metalwork	64
218	The Vase of a Kiln Worker	13
218	Mandarin Duck Rotatable Pot — A Rare Piece Among Wine Vessels	79
219	Art Innovation in Blue and White Porcelain	80
220	A Learning Tour in Chaozhou: Gongfu Tea, Snacks and Ceramics	32
220	Majie Melody Festival	80
220	The Craft of Pottery	82

ISSUE	MARTIAL ARTS AND SPORTS	PAGE
195	Learning Martial Arts at Shaolin Temple	28
202	The Acrobats of Liaocheng	40
209	The Golden Rock Beach in Autumn	48
211	Skiing Holiday in the Northeast	20
211	Football Fans' Bar in Dalian	60
219	Yuanji Exercises on Lianhua Mountain	60
219	Aiming High in Life — Rock Climbing in Kunming	70
219	Roulianxiang — the Folk Dance and Its Disciple	74
219	The Yuncheng Wushu School	76

ISSUE	FOOD	PAGE
186	Enjoying Tea at Panxi Restaurant	66
187	Eating Your Way Around China	26
188	"Yan Can Cook" in Beijing	34
188	A Second Lan Kwai Fong — Western-Style Bars in Shenzhen	48
189	"Yan Can Cook" in Xi'an	48
191	"Yan Can Cook" in Luoyang and Shaolin Temple	40
192	Martin Yan in Shanghai	58
195	In Search of "My Cuppa"	74
196	Daokou Roast Chicken	66
197	Spicy Beef Noodles — Lanzhou Flavour	72
198	Restaurant Famous for Medicinal Food	67
199	Alashan Mongolian Roasted Lamb	80
201	Taiyuan Wheaten Food Shop	60
203	Lieba Bread from Harbin	72
206	Nang — the Xinjiang Pizza	56
207	Tasting Melons Along the Silk Road	62
209	A Restaurant Entertaining Statesmen	54
212	Tasting Seafood at Beidaihe	58
214	Life is Art — A Visit to Yabo Tea Garden	82
215	Black Cuisine — Tasty Ant Dishes	52
216	Fish Dishes in Inner Mongolia	53
216	Bozhou Sesame Seed Cakes	54
217	Korean Dishes	62
218	The "Steaming Feast" in Chengdu	12
220	Shaoxing Food: Smelly Attractions	12
220	A Learning Tour in Chaozhou: Gongfu Tea, Snacks and Ceramics	32
221	Big Gate Crabs of Yangcheng Lake	66
221	Baozi — Steamed Buns Filled with Minced Meat and Gravy	80

ISSUE	PEOPLE	PAGE
187	The Dwarfs Village	74
188	Jay Cochrane's Tightrope Walk Across the Yangtse Gorge	38
191	A Tour of Confucius' Hometown	10
197	Xing Liangkun and His Ceramic World	68
198	Gao, the Grasshopper-Maker	82
201	The Peacock Lady	82
206	The "Stone Fiend" and the Rare Stone Museum	60
206	A Master Tea Maker in Chengdu	76
209	Liuyi Village: Last Home of Ladies with Bound Feet	34
210	Farmers on Hainan Island: Stories of Returned Overseas Chinese	34
210	Lhoke and His Sons	85
214	The Lotus Couple	74
215	An Australian Woman Marries in China	64
216	Bu Nong and His Bells	76
220	The Longest Hair on Earth	81

ISSUE	RELIGION	PAGE
187	Initiation of 500 Monks at the 500 Arhats Temple	50
188	Exploring the Dêgê Scripture Printing House	57
189	A Prayer Ceremony at Shenzhen's Hongfa Temple	65
190	The Oriental Capital of Buddhas — A New Sanctuary in Leshan	44
190	Unfolding Giant Thangka at Langmu Monastery	68
191	Xuanzhong Monastery — Birthplace of the Sukhavati Sect	70
192	The Mystery of Mt. Haitang	54
202	Studying Buddhism at the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau	78
206	Love God, Love Life, Pursue Happiness — Students in a Christian Seminary	74
209	A Journey into Paradise, Hell and the Mundane World	20
213	Rigoin: Homeland of the Buddha's Painters	36
215	Tibetan Christians in a Yunnan Village	84

ISSUE	ETHNIC MINORITIES	PAGE
186	Keriya People in the Taklimakan Desert	54
187	The Appeal of Ethnic Minorities	20
189	The Yiche People's Kuzhazha Festival in the Ailao Mountains	62
191	The Sanyuesan Festival of the Bouyei	44
192	Visiting the Horn-Haired Miao People	64
193	The Mountain Sculptors	18
193	The Kazaks in China	62
196	Festival Celebrations at Mount Liangshan	70
197	Insight into the Mosuo Community	40
198	Hui — the Chinese Muslims	60
198	Unique Musical Instruments of the Uygur People	68
199	The Colourful Miao	64
200	Marriage Customs of Ethnic Minorities	66
201	The Yi Waiters — Dancing While Serving	68
202	New Year Celebrations in a Qiang Village	6
202	The Qiang People	62
203	The Yi Ethnic Group	66
206	The Daolang Dance Festival	44
207	The Hanis in Yunnan	56
208	Back to Nature — An Eight-Day Tour Among Ethnic Minorities from Guiyang to Guilin	25
209	The Li People in Hainan	72
210	The Koreans in the Northeast	70
211	New Year in the Nujiang River Canyon	52
211	The Bai People of Yunnan	74
212	Russian Community in Xinjiang	82
213	The Mongolians — Warm and Generous People	74
216	Tradition Lives Among the Baima	58
218	Aksay — Home of the Kazaks	80
220	The Fish-Catching Festival of the Miao	72

China TOURISM

China
Spring Festival: Colourful Rural Celebrations
Shenzhen – A City Made in 15 Years
Hui – the Chinese Muslims
198

97 JAN 198

- Celebrating Spring Festival
- Fantastic Topography of Xinjiang
- Hui — the Chinese Muslims

97 FEB 199

- The Treasures of Dunhuang
- Miao — the People of Art
- Colourful Bashang Highland

China
Marrying - The Chinese Way
200 Special
China's Most Splendid Scenic Spots

97 MAR 200

- Marrying — the Chinese Way
- China's Most Splendid Scenic Spots

China
Xi'an Mysteries
201

97 APR 201

- Xi'an Mysteries
- Walking Through Taihang Mountains
- Idyllic Zhouzhuang

China
Meet the Chinese Acrobats
202

97 MAY 202

- Acrobats in Liaocheng
- Through the Hexi Corridor
- Qiang — an Ancient People

China
Inner Mongolian Grasslands
The Yi Ethnic Group
Driving in Tibet
203

97 JUNE 203

- Inner Mongolian Grasslands
- The Yi Ethnic Group
- Driving in Tibet

China
1997 Special
Hong Kong
204/205

97 JUL/AUG 204/205

- Hong Kong — Past & Present

China
Liukeng – A Forgotten Village
206

97 SEPT 206

- Liukeng — a Forgotten Village
- Fisher Folks' Wedding Ceremony
- Daolang Dance in Markit

China
The Beijing-Kowloon Railway
207

97 OCT 207

- Tour Along the Beijing-Kowloon Railway
- The Hanis In Yunnan
- Tasting Melons Along the Silk Road

China
Back to the Southwest
208

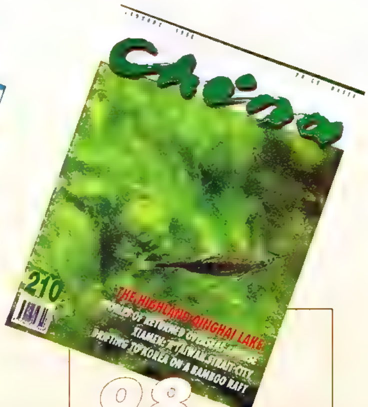
97 NOV 208

- Ethnic Minorities in the Southwest
- Daocheng-a Snowy Forest Region
- Trekking to Mêdog in Tibet

China
Into the World of the Last Generation of Footbound Women
209

97 DEC 209

- Last Generation of Foot-bound Women
- Wonders in Shanxi
- Longsheng in the Embrace of Nature


China
The Highland Qinghai Lake
210

98 JAN 210

- The Highland Qinghai Lake
- Drifting to Korea on a Bamboo Raft
- Travel on the "Silk Road Express"

BACK ISSUES(1997—1998)

China
BUDDHA'S PAINTERS IN RIGOIN
SIGHTSEEING ALONG NANXI RIVER
GOLDEN SPRING IN LUOPING
TIANJIN — THE PORT CITY

98 APR 213

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- Sightseeing Along Nanxi River
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